

THE
ENGLISH REVOLUTION
1640

THREE ESSAYS

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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS volume was first published for the tercentenary of 1640, and is now reprinted for the tercentenary of 1649. It contains three essays in interpretation whose common purpose is to estimate the significance of the revolution of 1640-9, perhaps the most important event that has yet occurred in English history. The essays deal with different aspects, social and cultural, of the revolution; but they are linked by the similar approach of the authors, and their conviction that an understanding of the problems and ideas of the seventeenth century will help us to solve the problems of to-day. The contributors, though in general agreement about the revolution, are each responsible only for the statements in his or her article.

For this edition minor corrections have been made in the first and third articles: the tragic death of Margaret James means that hers remains as it was originally printed. Considerable revision and expansion of the first article is badly needed, especially since the publication of Maurice Dobb's important *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*. But this proved technically impossible without delaying publication and increasing the price; and the essay must stand as a first approximation, with all its crudities and oversimplifications. For documentary evidence of some of the generalisations made in these articles, the reader may be referred to *The Good Old Cause*, a volume in the series "History in the Making." It may also help if I attempt here a definition

of two terms used in the first essay, which seem to have caused some misunderstanding.

I use the word *feudal* in the Marxist sense, and not in the more restricted sense adopted by most academic historians to describe narrowly military and legal relations. By "feudalism" I mean a form of society in which agriculture is the basis of economy and in which political power is monopolised by a class of landowners. The mass of the population consists of dependent peasants subsisting on the produce of their family holdings. The landowners were maintained by the rent paid by the peasants, which might be in the form of food or labour, as in early days, or (by the sixteenth century) in money. In such a society there is room for small handicraft production, exchange of products, internal and overseas trade; but commerce and industry are subordinated to and plundered by the landowners and their state. Mr. Dobb has shown very clearly how *merchant* capital can develop within feudalism without changing the mode of production; a challenge to the old ruling class and its state comes only with the development of the capitalist mode of production in industry and agriculture (see *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, esp. pp. 120-4, 134-8).

The word *progressive* as used in this essay does not necessarily imply moral approval. It means simply that the tendency or social group so described contributed to the expansion of the wealth of the community. The "progressive" (i.e. capitalist) farming of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to expropriation of many small peasants; the wealth produced by the new methods came into the hands of a small group of profiteers; the village community was broken up.

Nevertheless, more wealth *was* produced: the alternative would have been economic stagnation or retrogression. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Spain show what such stagnation would have meant for the political and cultural life of the community. In the long run the creation of new wealth by the rise of capitalism in England opened up the possibility of a more equitable distribution at a new level, just as the horrors of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century created the economic basis for a transition to socialism. Thus although I am far from absolutely "approving" of any tendency which I label "progressive" in the seventeenth century, the suggestion is that *of the then possible alternatives* it was that tendency (because it developed the national wealth) *without which* the advance to a better society would have been impossible. We do not need to idealise "merrie England" to realise that much was lost by the disruption of the mediæval village; but its relative equality and communal spirit had always been accompanied by grinding poverty for the mass of the population, and were doomed by the sixteenth century, anyway. Equality and a communal spirit, combined with a reasonable and rising standard of living only become attainable after capitalism has performed its historical task of laying the industrial foundation for a socialist society. Hence in 1949 we can see our way to realising the dreams of the Levellers and Diggers in 1649.

CHRISTOPHER HILL.

August, 1948

I

THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

I. INTRODUCTION

THE object of this essay is to suggest an interpretation of the events of the seventeenth century different from that which most of us were taught at school. To summarise it briefly, this interpretation is that the English Revolution of 1640-60 was a great social movement like the French Revolution of 1789. An old order that was essentially feudal was destroyed by violence, a new and capitalist social order created in its place. The Civil War was a class war, in which the despotism of Charles I was defended by the reactionary forces of the established Church and feudal landlords. Parliament beat the King because it could appeal to the enthusiastic support of the trading and industrial classes in town and countryside, to the yeomen and progressive gentry, and to wider masses of the population whenever they were able by free discussion to understand what the struggle was really about. The rest of this essay will try to prove and illustrate these generalisations.

The orthodox attitude to the seventeenth-century revolution is misleading because it does not try to penetrate below the surface, because it takes the actors in the revolution at their face value, and assumes that the best way to find out what people were fighting

about is to consider what the leaders *said* they were fighting about. Thus we all know that during the seventeenth century England underwent a profound political revolution. Everyone has heard of Oliver Cromwell and his Roundheads, King Charles and his Cavaliers, and we all know that a King of England had his head cut off. But why did this happen? What was it all about? Has it any significance for us at the present day?

These questions are not usually very satisfactorily answered in the text-books. The bloodshed and violence which accompanied the revolution are usually slurred over as regrettable incidents, when Englishmen for once descended to the wicked Continental practice of fighting one another about politics. But that was only because mistakes were made, opportunities for British compromise were missed: what a good thing, the books imply, that we are so much wiser and more sensible to-day! So they do not ever give us reasons which would seem to us sufficient to justify the devotion and the sacrifices of our ancestors in their struggles.

The most usual explanation of the seventeenth-century revolution is one that was put forward by the leaders of the Parliament of 1640 themselves in their propaganda statements and appeals to the people. It has been repeated with additional detail and adornments by Whig and Liberal historians ever since. This explanation says that the Parliamentary armies were fighting for the liberty of the individual and his rights in law against a tyrannical Government that threw him into prison without trial by jury, taxed him without asking his consent, billeted soldiers in his house, robbed him of his property, and attempted to destroy

his cherished parliamentary institutions. Now all this is true—as far as it goes. The Stuarts did try to stop people meeting and holding political discussions, did cut off the ears of people who criticised the government, did dip their hands deep into the pockets of the taxpayers, did try to shut up Parliament and rule the country by nominated officials. All that is true. And although Parliament in the seventeenth century was even less genuinely representative of ordinary people than it is at the present day, still its victory was important as establishing a certain amount of self-government for the richer classes in society.

But further questions are still unanswered. Why did the King become tyrannical? Why did the landed and commercial classes represented in Parliament have to fight for their liberties? During the sixteenth century, under the Tudor rulers, the grandfathers of the parliamentarians of 1640 were the monarchy's stoutest supporters. What had happened to change their outlook? Parliament had supported Henry VII and Henry VIII and Elizabeth in their efforts to police the country against the anarchy and brigandage of overmighty subjects, of feudal potentates with their private armies, and England had been made safe for commercialism. Parliament had also supported Henry VIII and Elizabeth in their victorious struggle against the international Catholic Church: money no longer went from England to Rome, British policy was no longer dictated by the interests of a foreign power. Parliament, finally, encouraged Queen Elizabeth in her resistance to the political ally of the Papacy, the Spanish Empire; and the plunder of the New World was thrown open to Drake, Hawkins and the piratical but Protestant seadogs.

The Tudors, in short, were backed by the politically effective classes because the latter did very well out of Tudor rule. Why did the Stuarts, James I and Charles I, lose this support? It was not because James, who succeeded Elizabeth in 1603, was a particularly stupid man, a Scot who did not understand England, though many historians have seriously argued thus. But one has only to read what James, Charles, and their supporters wrote and said, or examine what they did, to see that so far from being merely stupid, they were either able men trying to impose a vicious policy, or men whose ideas were hopelessly out of date and therefore reactionary. The causes of the civil war must be sought in society, not in individuals.

Another school of historians—which we may call “Tory,” as opposed to the Whigs—holds that the royal policy was not tyrannical at all, that Charles I, as he told the Court which sentenced him to death, spoke “not for my own right alone, as I am your King, but for the true liberty of all my subjects.” Clarendon, who deserted the Parliament in 1642 and later became Charles II’s first minister, developed this theory in several volumes of eloquent prose in his *History of the Great Rebellion*; it is now propagated by a number of historians whose political prejudices, royalist or Catholic sympathies, and bias against liberalism in general, make up for their lack of historical understanding. Their idea is that Charles I and his advisers were really trying to protect ordinary people from economic exploitation by a small class of capitalists on the make; and that the opposition which faced Charles was organised and worked up to serve their own purposes by those business men who identified their interests

with the House of Commons in politics and Puritanism in religion.

Now, it is true that the English Revolution of 1640, like the French Revolution of 1789, was a struggle for political, economic and religious power, waged by the middle class, the bourgeoisie, which grew in wealth and strength as capitalism developed. But it is not true that as against them the royal Government stood for the interests of the common people: on the contrary, the popular parties proved to be the King's most militant opponents, far more vigorous and ruthless and thorough-going than the bourgeoisie itself.

The interests for which Charles's monarchy stood were not those of the common people at all. It represented the bankrupt landowning nobles, and its policy was influenced by a Court clique of aristocratic commercial racketeers and their hangers-on, sucking the life-blood from the whole people by methods of economic exploitation which we shall be considering later on. The middle-class struggle to shake off the control of this group was not merely selfish; it fulfilled a progressive historical function. The sharper-witted landowners were grafting themselves as parasites on to the new growth of capitalism, since their own mode of economic existence no longer sufficed to maintain them. It was necessary for the further development of capitalism that this choking parasitism should be ended by the smashing of the feudal state. And free capitalist development was of much more benefit to the masses of the population than the maintenance of an out-moded, unproductive and parasitic feudalism.

The new economic facts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made the feudal economic and social

system unworkable, and those of its defenders who looked regretfully back to the stability and relative security of the peasantry in the Middle Ages were quite unrealistic and in effect reactionary. Their role was the same as that of many liberals at the present day who think how nice it would be if capitalism could still work in the "liberal" nineteenth-century way, without having to resort quite so frequently to fascism and war. But fine words alter no historic processes. History has passed on and left these apologists of an imaginary system standing, just as it left Charles I's defenders.

These two theories, then, are both one-sided. The Whigs stress the progressive nature of the revolution, and slur over the fact that the class that took the lead in the revolution and most profited by its achievements was the bourgeoisie. Their interpretation perpetuates the legend that the interests of the bourgeoisie are the interests of the nation, a legend obviously convenient for our own day, though so much less true now than in the seventeenth century. The Tories, on the other hand, stress the class nature of the revolution in an attempt to deny its progressiveness and value in its own time, to whitewash feudalism, and to suggest that revolutions never benefit more than a narrow clique.

A third and more familiar theory is emphasised by both sides: that the conflict was to decide which of two religions, Puritanism or Anglicanism, was to be dominant in England. Here, again, the effect of this explanation is to make us pity and misunderstand the men of the seventeenth century, and congratulate ourselves on being so much more sensible to-day: however much Anglicans and Nonconformists may dislike one

another personally, we say, they no longer fight in the village street. But this is to miss the point. Certainly religious squabbles fill many pages of the pamphlet literature of the seventeenth century: both sides justified their attitude ultimately in religious terms, believed they were fighting God's battles. But "religion" covered something much wider than it does to-day. The Church throughout the Middle Ages, and down to the seventeenth century, was something very different from what we call a Church to-day. It guided all the movements of men from baptism to the burial service, and was the gateway to that life to come in which all men fervently believed. The Church educated children; in the village parishes—where the mass of the people was illiterate—the parson's sermon was the main source of information on current events and problems. The parish itself was an important unit of local government, collecting and doling out such pittances as the poor received. The Church controlled men's feelings and told them what to believe, provided them with entertainment and shows. It took the place of news and propaganda services now covered by many different and more efficient institutions—the Press, the B.B.C., the cinema, the club, and so forth. That is why men took notes at sermons; it is also why the government told preachers often exactly what to preach.

For example, Queen Elizabeth "tuned her pulpits" ("as governing persons now strive to tune their morning newspapers," said Carlyle); she circulated an official book of homilies to all preachers to make sure they said the right things. It was "to be read in every parish church agreeably," and concludes with a sermon in six parts condemning "disobedience and wilful

rebellion." Bishops and priests were far more like civil servants, part of the government's administrative machine, than they are at present; and the first to recognise this fact were the ecclesiastics themselves. Bancroft, a prelate of late Elizabethan times, mocked at the Puritan claim to be dealing simply with Church matters. "How far these words Church causes . . . extend!" he cried. "You see into what an infinite sea of affairs they would thrust their elderships."¹ "Presume not," warned the Anglican Hooker, "ye that are sheep, to make yourselves guides of them that should guide you. . . . For God is not a God of sedition and confusion, but of order and of peace."²

The Church, then, defended the existing order, and it was important for the Government to maintain its control over this publicity and propaganda agency. For the same reason, those who wanted to overthrow the feudal state had to attack and seize control of the Church. That is why political theories tended to get wrapped up in religious language. It was not that our seventeenth-century forefathers were much more conscientious and saintly men than we are. Whatever may be true of Ireland or Spain, we in England to-day can see our problems in secular terms just because our ancestors put an end to the use of the Church as an exclusive and persecuting instrument of political power. We can be sceptical and tolerant in religious matters, not because we are wiser and better, but because Cromwell, stabling in cathedrals the horses of the most disciplined and most democratic cavalry

¹ Bancroft, *A Survey of the Pretended Holy Discipline*, ed. 1593, pp. 281-2.

² Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Everyman Edition, I, pp. 95-6.

the world had yet seen, won a victory which for ever stopped men being flogged and branded for having unorthodox views about the Communion service. As long as the power of the State was weak and uncentralised, the Church with its parson in every parish, the parson with honoured access to every household, could tell people what to believe and how to behave; and behind the threats and censures of the Church were all the terrors of hell fire. Under these circumstances social conflicts inevitably became religious conflicts.

But the fact that men spoke and wrote in religious language should not prevent us realising that there is a social content behind what are apparently purely theological ideas. Each class created and sought to impose the religious outlook best suited to its own needs and interests. But the real clash is between these class interests: behind the parson stood the squire.

It is not, then, denied that the "Puritan Revolution" was a religious as well as a political struggle; but it was more than that. What men were fighting about was the whole nature and future development of English society. This will be illustrated in the following pages, but it is worth showing now that contemporaries knew perfectly well what it was all about, far better, in fact, than many later historians.

It was not merely that, when the victory of the bourgeoisie had been achieved, thinkers like Harrington, Neville, Defoe recognised that the war had been primarily a struggle over property. Shrewd politicians showed in the heat of the contest that they knew well enough who their opponents were. As early as 1603, James I told Parliament that the Puritans—

"do not so far differ from us in point of religion as in their confused form of policy and parity, being ever discontented with the present government •and impatient to suffer any superiority, which maketh their sects insufferable in any well-governed commonwealth."¹

The political theorist, Hobbes, describes how the Presbyterian merchant class of the city of London was the first centre of sedition, trying to build a state governed like the republics of Holland and Venice, by merchants for their own interests. (The comparison with the bourgeois republics is constantly recurring in Parliamentary writings.) Mrs. Hutchinson, the wife of one of Cromwell's colonels, said all were described as Puritans who "crossed the views of the needy courtiers, the proud encroaching priests, the thievish projectors, the lewd nobility and gentry . . . whoever could endure a sermon, modest habit or conversation, or anything good."² Baxter, a leading Puritan divine, was even more explicit:

"A very great part of the knights•and gentlemen of England . . . adhered to the King. . . . And most of the tenants of these gentlemen, and also most of the poorest of the people, whom the others call the rabble, did follow the gentry and were for the King. On the Parliament's side were (besides themselves) the smaller part (as some thought) of the gentry in most of the counties, and the greatest part of the tradesmen and freeholders and the middle sort of men, especially in those corporations and counties which depend on clothing and such manufactures."³

¹ *Parliamentary History of England*, I, p. 982.

² *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*, Everyman Edition, pp. 64-5.

³ *Autobiography*, Everyman Edition, p. 34.

He concluded—

“Freeholders and tradesmen are the strength of religion and civility in the land; and gentlemen and beggars and servile tenants are the strength of iniquity.”¹

Why he lumped together precisely these classes will shortly become evident.

¹ *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, p. 89.

2. ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

(a) *The Land*

ENGLAND at the beginning of the seventeenth century was a predominantly agricultural country. The overwhelming mass of the population lived in the countryside, engaged either wholly or partially in producing foodstuffs or wool. For centuries England had been a feudal state, made up of isolated local communities producing for their own consumption, with very little trade between them. But gradually from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries a change began to come over the structure of this agricultural community. The food and wool from the village began to sell far afield: the spinsters and the husbandmen were turned into commodity-producers for a national market.

In 1492, moreover, Christopher Columbus had discovered America. English merchants followed him there, and also penetrated overseas to India and Russia. As industry and commerce developed, as the overseas market for English cloth expanded, some areas ceased to be economically self-sufficient, and had to be fed and supplied with wool for their looms. So we get the beginnings of a specialised division of labour. In the south of England—then the economically advanced part of the country—different regions began to concentrate on producing particular commodities. Those who had money began to keep large flocks of

sheep, to grow food for this wider market, either on their own estates or on leased land. And very well they did out of it, too. For prices were going up. Silver had been discovered in America and began to flow into Europe at a time when commerce was expanding and money relations between landlord and tenant, employer and workman, were replacing the old relations based on payment in goods or labour services. Prices rose all through the sixteenth century: between 1510 and 1580 food trebled in price in England, and textiles rose by 150 per cent. This had the same effect as an inflation in our day. Those with fixed incomes got poorer, those living by trade and production for the market grew richer. So the middle classes prospered, the high feudal aristocracy (including the King and the bishops) and the smaller peasantry grew relatively poorer, except for the few individuals from those classes who were lucky enough to get in on the racket.

There was another factor. In 1536-40, in what is called the Reformation, the monasteries of England had been dissolved and their property confiscated. This was part of the struggle by which the national independence of England was established against the power and exploitation of the Catholic Church, and so was enthusiastically supported by the bourgeoisie and Parliament. Nor did they do badly out of it, for a great quantity of valuable and hitherto inaccessible land confiscated from the Church was thrown on to the market.

All these happenings were changing the structure of English rural society. Land was becoming a highly attractive field for investment of capital. People who had money wanted to buy land with it, and there were

more and more people with money. In feudal England land had passed by inheritance from father to son, cultivated all the time in traditional ways for the consumption of one family; it had changed hands only after lengthy law-suits or violent seizure. But now, the law adapting itself to the economic needs of society, land was beginning to become a commodity, bought and sold in a competitive market, and thus capital heaped up in the towns spilt over into the countryside.

The northern and western parts of England remained relatively untouched by the new commercial spirit radiating from London and the ports; but in the south and east many landowners were beginning to exploit their estates in a new way. Both in the Middle Ages and in the seventeenth century the first importance of an estate was that it supplied a landowner (through his control over the labours of others) with the means of livelihood. But over and above this, the large estates had in the Middle Ages maintained with their surplus agricultural produce a body of retainers who would on occasion act as soldiers, and so were the basis of the political power of the feudalists. Now, with the development of the capitalist mode of production within the structure of feudalism, many landowners began to market that portion of the produce of their estates which was not consumed by their families. So they came to regard their estates in a new light: as a source of money profit, of profits that were elastic and could be increased. Rents used to be fixed at levels maintained so long that they came to be regarded as "customary," as having existed "from time immemorial"; so did the many extortionate legal charges which feudal landowners extracted from the peasantry; but now they

were being "racked up" to fantastically high levels. This was in itself a moral as well as an economic revolution, a break with all that men had held right and proper, and had the most disturbing effects on ways of thought and belief.

Codes of morals are always bound up with a given social order. Feudal society had been dominated by custom, tradition. Money had been comparatively unimportant. It was an outrage to the morals of such a society that men's rents should be sharply raised, and that if they could not pay, they should be turned out on the roads to beg, steal or starve. In time, the needs of growing capitalism produced a new morality—the morality of "God helps those who help themselves." But in the sixteenth century the idea that profit was more important than human life, so familiar to us that we have lost our sense of moral indignation, was very new and very shocking.

"Is not he a greater theefe," wrote the Puritan moralist, Stubbes, "that robbeth a man of his good name for ever, that taketh a man's house over his head, before his years be expired, that wresteth from a man his goods, his lands and livings . . . than he that stealeth a sheep, a cow, or an ox, for necessity's sake only, having not otherwise to relieve his need?"¹

But what did moral problems matter to the new type of landowners? They forced their real incomes up to meet the rise in the prices of the goods they had to buy. They were able to evict tenants unable to pay the new rents, whose small holdings, perhaps, stood in the way of consolidating an estate into a large compact

¹ P. Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, ed. Furnivall, Part II, p. 14.

block for profitable sheep-farming on a large scale. Often rents were raised because the estate itself had been bought at the competitive prices prevailing in the land market. And then the speculative purchaser wanted to get back in profits the capital he had laid out in his purchase money, in equipment, and in improved methods of cultivation.

A new kind of landowner was thus emerging in the Home Counties—the capitalist landowner. He might be a pirate or a slave-trader, a respectable City merchant who had done well in currants or a country clothing capitalist. In any case he was looking for a safe investment for his profits, and one that would at the same time give him social standing.

For landowners controlled local government, as lords of manors or as justices of the peace. Only landowners were elected by their fellow landowners to represent the county in Parliament. The boroughs, too, came more and more to be represented in the House of Commons by a neighbouring gentleman. But the new landowner might be a feudal lord drawn by the pull of a near-by market and able to raise capital to re-organise the management of his estates; or he might come from the richer stratum of the peasantry.

Many of the latter class—the yeomen—were able by their wealth and ability to keep possession of their plots of land, to extend and consolidate them, to share in the new opportunities offered where they had access to a market. In the sixteenth century such men were setting to work, consolidating their scattered strips of land, converting unenclosed arable to pasture or increasing their output of corn, fruit, vegetables, dairy produce for the town market. They were changing old-established

tenures—turning copyholds into leaseholds, letting their lands for shorter periods—and ruthlessly evicting tenants unable to pay the new economic rents demanded.¹

By all these means they enriched themselves in the same way as merchants and industrialists in the towns, and a class earning its wealth in a new way came to occupy a predominant position in some counties of southern and eastern England. This class was the basis of the famous squirearchy which was to govern England for the next three centuries.

But they did not have things all their own way before 1640. The structure of society was still essentially feudal; so were its laws and its political institutions. There were still many legal restrictions on the full unhampered capitalist utilisation of landed property, on free trade in land. These restrictions were maintained in the interests of the Crown, the feudal land-owning class, and to a lesser extent, of the peasantry, anxious to live in the old secure way paying the old fixed dues. This legal network had to be broken through if rural capitalism was to develop the resources of the countryside to the full.

Bad communications still prevented the full development of a national market, restricted the possibilities of division of labour and so of capitalist developments in agriculture. So there still persisted in many parts even

¹ Copyholds were the normal peasant holdings, usually hereditary. The copyholder held by "the custom of the manor," was enrolled as occupier in the legal documents of the manor court. His right to possession was not always recognised by the common law courts. One of the great struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that in which copyholders strove to win full legal security for their tenures, whilst lords of manors (landlords) strove to render their possession uncertain and to keep it subject to decision in the manor court, presided over by the lord of the manor or his steward.

of the south and east, and all over northern and western England, landowners who lacked either the ability, the capital, the psychology or the opportunity to exploit their estates in the new way. They were still attempting to maintain feudal pomp and ceremony, still running their estates in the traditional way. Their courts were thronged with blue-blooded hangers-on, poor relations and retainers, who performed no productive functions in society, but still believed that the world owed them a living—"Drones" was what the bourgeois pamphleteers called them, as they had called the monks before them: "needless and disorderly attendants, old captains, old courtiers, unuseful scholars, and companions" was the unflattering description given by an astute steward of one of these large estates.¹

The focus of this society was the King's Court, the largest landowner of this kind, the Crown itself, always short of capital. The bishops also were notoriously unprogressive landowners:

"Others attributed anti-clericalism to the close political connection between the clergy and the land-owning class, and to the large amount of ill-developed land in the possession of the Church itself."²

Times were hard for these parasites and *rentiers*. The rise in prices made it impossible for them to keep up their old standards of living, still less to compete in luxury with the merchant princes. They were continually in debt, usually to some smart city business man who demanded a mortgage on their estate, and

¹ J. Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, Vol. II, p. 114.

² That exact description of the state of affairs in seventeenth-century England is, in fact, taken from the report of a group of Anglican and Free Churchmen who visited Spain in January and February, 1937.

stepped into it when the debt fell due. The needy courtier, the proud but penniless younger son of a noble house, were commonplaces of popular derision and middle-class contempt. Yet this class was still a social and political power; the State was organised to safeguard its interests. Its inability to reorganise its estates was keeping a large amount of capital uninvested. Much of the richest land in England was not utilised to the full technical capacities of the time.¹ State power was being used to *prevent* the growth of a national market.

There was an acute struggle of all classes to profit by the agricultural changes taking place. In general they made for greater productivity, and enabled some richer peasants and small landowners to rise in the world. But for many smaller cultivators they meant depression, the raising of rents and dues of various kinds, the enclosure of the common fields on which the villagers had for centuries pastured their cattle and geese. Many husbandmen whose small properties stood in the way of a landlord wanting to consolidate a large sheep farm were brutally evicted.

"Your sheep," wrote Sir Thomas More in the early sixteenth century, "that were wont to be so meek and tame, and so small eaters, now, as I hear say, be become so great devourers and so wild, that they eat up and swallow down the very men themselves."²

¹ A similar situation exists under capitalism at the present time, where big monopoly concerns buy up inventions in order to prevent them being used, and where food is destroyed whilst millions go hungry. The seventeenth-century English revolution by transferring State power to the bourgeoisie made possible the full development of all the resources of English society in the eighteenth century. A transition to socialism will be necessary to win the same result in England to-day.

² *Utopia*, Everyman Edition, p. 23.

"The psychology of landowning had been revolutionised," Professor Tawney sums up, "and for two generations the sharp landlord, instead of using his seigniorial right to fine or arrest runaways from the villein nest, had been hunting for flaws in titles, screwing up admission fines, twisting manorial customs, and, when he dared, turning copyholds into leases."¹

Or, as Philip Stubbes put it: "Landlords make merchandise of their poor tenants."

Against this treatment revolt smouldered throughout the period; it broke out into open rebellion in 1549 and 1607, but each time the peasantry was beaten back into submission. The State is always an instrument of coercion in the hands of the ruling class; and landlords ruled sixteenth-century England. Some of these poor tenants became vagabonds wandering the roads for bread, so laws were passed ordering vagrants to be branded or to be "whipped until his or her shoulders be bloody." "The fathers of the present working-class," as Marx puts it in *Capital*, "were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as 'voluntary' criminals."² Others became agricultural labourers working on the large estates. Others again provided a useful supply of cheap labour for the expanding clothing industry. Both these groups were without land to support them in independence in a bad year or when their employers went bankrupt. They were on their way to becoming proletarians, with nothing to offer in

¹ Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Penguin Edition, p. 139.

² Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, ed. Dona Torr, p. 758.

the market but their labour, at the mercy of all the fluctuations and insecurity of capitalism.

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“Thus,” to quote Marx again, “thus were the agricultural people, first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system.”¹

We must be careful, however, not to antedate these developments, nor to exaggerate their extent: they are significant as the dominant tendency. Similarly the new progressive landowners catch the eye as the rising and expanding class perhaps more than could be justified statistically. The improving landlord was not typical before 1660.

And we must remember what the agricultural changes in pre-revolutionary England were. They took place within a given system of technical equipment. There was no large-scale revolution in agricultural *technique* till the eighteenth century, though its first beginnings can be traced back to the revolutionary decades of the seventeenth century. The changes of the period before 1640, which were enormously accelerated in the years between 1640 and 1660, were changes in landownership, and in the volume of production rather than in the technique of production. So the changes had no revolutionary effect on society as a whole. The new class of progressive landowners was there, thrusting its way forward, hampered by feudal survivals, without whose abolition it could not develop freely; in the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 761.

revolution it took over the State, creating the conditions within which further expansion was possible.

On the other hand, not only did large areas in the north and west remain unaffected by the new changes, but even where these changes were taking place large sections of the peasantry still survived in 1640 as semi-independent cultivators. This important group found itself in temporary alliance with the dominant bourgeois forces in opposition to a Crown which did little to help it; but when it discovered, as it did after 1647, what the real aims of its allies were, it fought, in company with other radical elements, to push the revolution leftwards. But because its instincts and social aims were to some extent pre-capitalist, looking backward to a stable peasant community, it was bound to be defeated. The current is one which cannot be ignored because it explains why in Puritan social ideas and Leveller¹ social aims there is a trend that is "mediæval" and even reactionary.

(b) Industry and Trade

Though most English people before 1640 worked in the fields, changes no less important than those we have described were taking place in trade and industry, changes, indeed, which gave the impetus to the agrarian developments. An industrial revolution took place in the century before 1640, stimulated by capital liberated at the dissolution and plunder of the monasteries, or acquired by trade, piracy and plunder from the New World or by the slave trade. England had long been a great wool-growing country exporting

¹ The Levellers were the left wing of the revolutionaries. Who they were and what their aims were is discussed below.

raw material to the Netherlands to be worked up into cloth. Now the English clothing industry developed with great rapidity, and English merchants began to export finished or semi-finished cloths on a far larger scale. At the same time a great development took place in coal-mining; by 1640 England produced over four-fifths of the coal of Europe. Coal played a prominent part in the growth of very many other industries—iron, tin, glass, soap, shipbuilding.

This industrial boom caused a great expansion in the volume of England's trade, and the switch-over from export of raw materials to finished products caused a change in its direction too. England ceased to be merely a source of raw materials for the west European countries, began to compete with their manufactures and so to reach further afield for markets, raw materials and luxury imports—to Russia, Turkey, the East and West Indies. Hence the beginnings of English colonisation, in order to develop trade and to win monopoly political control over the parts of the world which England was aiming to exploit economically. This called for a stronger State machine and led to the rise of English sea-power in order to challenge Spain, the great colonial power.

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 gave English overseas commerce the chance to develop freely. On the other hand, it made the commercial classes in England more acutely aware of the restrictions checking their expansion at home. Parliament began to attack the monarchy and its attempt to regulate the economic life of the country from the moment when the defeat of the Armada created a feeling of political security. (We must not exaggerate the *extent* of this

development before 1640, because it was hampered by many obstructions, as we shall see: but the *tendency* is clear.)

These new economic developments created new class conflicts. Capital for industrial development was supplied, directly or indirectly, by merchants, slave-traders and pirates, who had amassed fortunes overseas, and also by that section of the gentry which had made its fortune in the plunder of the monasteries and in the new agriculture.

From the start the merchants, organised in companies, controlled export, as they had done throughout the Middle Ages; merchant middlemen dominated internal trade. The factory system had not yet developed; the "putting-out" system, by which wool or yarn was supplied by the merchant to be spun or woven by the labourer and his family in his own home (also called the "domestic system"), meant that even if the producer sometimes owned the instruments of production—spinning-wheel or loom—he was completely dependent on his employer for supplies and so for his income. In bad periods he was continually falling into debt, usually to the capitalist who employed him. In this way, vast fortunes were made by employers and usurers at the expense of small proprietors.

Occasionally, indeed, a small master managed to "better himself" by fortunate borrowing of the capital which was indispensable if one was to get on, but far more were unlucky. Hence the small producers joined in the clamour of the feudal landlords against "usury." They could not do without loans, and yet were crippled by the high rates of interest which could be exacted in a

pre-capitalist society. "Usury" was to ordinary people what wage-labour is to their successors to-day. The employer exploited his workman under the domestic system by charging him high prices and high rates of interest even more than by paying him low wages. Hence there was coming into existence a petty-bourgeois class with specific economic interests of its own, but changing in composition as its most enterprising and lucky members rose to become capitalists, and the unfortunate sank to be wage-labourers. The strongholds of this class were East Anglia and the south Midlands, later to be the centres of the most uncompromising resistance to Charles I.

There were as many and as serious obstacles to the expansion of capitalism in trade and industry as in agriculture. During the Middle Ages trade and industry had been restricted to the towns, where they had been rigidly controlled by the guilds. These were associations of producers who established a monopoly over the local market and kept it by restricting output and competition, regulating prices and quality of production, controlling their apprentices and journeymen. (Under the apprentice system an artisan had to undergo seven years' training before being allowed to set up on his own.) This system presupposed a static and closed local market; feudal economic theory was based on the idea of a comparatively stable society.

But now the market was expanding: the whole nation was becoming one economic unit. Capital sought profits by investment in any economic activity, and the capitalist was not interested in knowing where his products were sold, provided they sold at a profit. The

local barriers to trade broke down. The market town could no longer bully the surrounding countryside, for it had to face the competition of merchants from London, peddling their wares and buying up the products of local handicrafts. Competition broke up monopoly. For overseas trade, indeed, merchants still found it advantageous to join together in companies for self-defence in distant lands and unpoliced seas: in those days every merchant was a pirate in his spare time. The Tudor State was able to keep some control over these companies by selling them its protection and generous charters of privileges.

But it was very different in industry. The high standards of quality of the town craft guilds, their restrictions on competition and output, became in the eyes of capitalist entrepreneurs so many stupid obstacles to free production, preventing them meeting the demands of the expanding market. To escape from these shackles, industry overflowed from the boroughs to the suburbs and unincorporated towns and countryside, where production was free from interference and regulation. Here they found a supply of cheap labour in the peasantry ruined and expropriated by the agricultural changes. Many of the new industries—e.g. coal and alum mining—were almost entirely capitalist from the start. Nevertheless, the corporate towns still tried to monopolise local trade, to make their markets a bottle-neck through which all commodities must flow.

The merchant middlemen, on the other hand, were trying to meet the demands of the London and export market by dealing direct with the producer (e.g. of food). So they came into conflict with the market

regulations of the corporate towns and their reactionary oligarchies. Their privileges and restrictions, and the apprentice system, remained as a serious check to the full development of the productive resources of the country, to the free flow of capital into industry. The guilds were so many vested interests linked up with the social structure of feudalism, opposed to the newer, freer forces of capitalism.

As the old industrial controls broke down, the Crown, in the interests of the feudal landowning class (and a small court group of financiers and racketeers), tried to impose new controls. Monopolies—the sale to a particular individual of exclusive rights of production and/or sale of a particular commodity (or the exclusive right to trade in a particular overseas market)—were the means by which the Crown tried to bring industry and trade under control, on a national scale now that the town guilds had been circumvented. We shall see how this attempt failed, and the disastrous results of its failure for the monarchy.

It can be realised how this vast industrial and commercial expansion reacted on agriculture and landholding: for the agrarian changes were caused in part by the demand for more food to feed the new urban areas, in part by the demand for wool for the expanding clothing industry, or by the hunt for minerals; in each case the needs of the merchant class were identical with those of the progressive landowners. And the migration of merchant capital to the countryside, whether by the purchase of estates or by loans, brought a new business and competitive spirit into the hitherto relatively static and traditional agrarian relations. Where the families of tenant and landlord had for

centuries occupied their respective estates, the tenant paying a non-economic rent,¹ relations were very different from those existing between a new purchaser and a capitalist lessee.

The point to be stressed is this. There was a great deal of capital in England which merchants and gentlemen were anxious to invest in the freest possible industrial, commercial and agricultural development. This was continually thwarted by feudal survivals in town and country, and by government policy deliberately endeavouring in the interests of the old landed ruling class to restrict production and the accumulation of capital. Thus, in attacking the feudal order and the oligarchy of big merchants in alliance with the Court who were trying to monopolise business profits, the struggle of the bourgeoisie was progressive, representing the interests of the country as a whole.

England in 1640 was still ruled by landlords and the relations of production were still mainly feudal, but there was this vast and expanding capitalist sector, whose development the Crown and feudal landlords could not for ever hold in check. There were few proletarians (except in London), most of the producers under the putting-out system being also small peasants. But these peasants and small artisans were losing their independence. They were hit especially hard by the general rise in prices, and were being brought into ever closer dependence on the merchants and squires. A

¹ I.e. a rent which did not correspond to the price now obtainable for the land. The landlord could make more by leasing his lands at rack-rent than by himself receiving the services, dues in kind, etc., supplied by customary tenants. So security of tenure for the latter (copyholders), if received, would have been an obstacle to the capitalist development of agriculture (see p. 25, n.).

statute of 1563 forbade the poorer 75 per cent. of the rural population to go as apprentices into industry.

So there were really three classes in conflict. As against the parasitic feudal landowners and speculative financiers, as against the government whose policy was to restrict and control industrial expansion, the interests of the new class of capitalist merchants and farmers were temporarily identical with those of the small peasantry and artisans and journeymen. But conflict between the two latter classes was bound to develop, since the expansion of capitalism involved the dissolution of the old agrarian and industrial relationships and the transformation of independent small masters and peasants into proletarians.

3. POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

(a) *The Tudor monarchy*

SET against this background of economic and social transition, the role of the Tudor monarchy becomes clear. Itself rooted in feudalism, it could to a certain extent balance between the bourgeoisie and progressive gentry, on the one hand, and the feudals on the other. After the great noble houses had destroyed one another in the fifteenth-century Wars of the Roses, the strength of the advancing and declining classes was in equilibrium for a brief period, during which the function of the monarchy was to see that the inevitable acceptance of bourgeois demands did the least possible harm to the ruling class. The merchants wished for a united England, orderly and policed, with uniform laws, weights and measures: Henry VII and his successors saw to it that this unity centred around the person of the King, that the policing was done by the country gentry (J.Ps.). The bourgeoisie attacked the Church for its wealth and unproductiveness; Henry VIII led the "reformation" of 1529-40, and saw to it that the political power and a part of the wealth of the Church passed to the Crown. Most of the monastic estates went to those who had money to buy them, and so strengthened the new element in the countryside. Queen Mary succeeded in re-establishing Catholicism for a few years, but could not get the monastic estates back out of the clutches of their purchasers. Similarly,

the Crown tried to control trade and industry in the interests of the national exchequer, posed frequently as the defender of the peasant and artisan against the rich: but always in the last resort it continued to retreat before the bourgeoisie, on whom it depended for supplies and loans.

In fact, until about 1590, the monarchy had many interests in common with those of the bourgeoisie in town and country—in the struggle against Spain, against the international Catholic Church, against rival noble houses disputing supreme control with the House of Tudor and ruining the country with their private wars. Hence the collaboration in Parliament between monarchy and bourgeoisie. Yet there was a point beyond which the retreat could not be continued, and ultimately the unity of interest broke down.

Up to a point, indeed, the bourgeoisie and the feudal gentry were able to get along together under the monarchy. In an age when plunder and piracy helped in the rapid accumulation of capital, the reckless sea-dogs of the semi-feudal south-western counties—Devon and Cornwall—heaped up wealth on a scale which the more cautious merchants of London could never have imitated. In looting Spanish colonies and Spanish treasure ships for gold, in the quest for land in Ireland and North America, the adventurers of the decaying class did not come into conflict with the rising entrepreneurs. Those who were fortunate acquired the capital necessary to take part in production for the market themselves: the lines of class division had not yet crystallised.

This hardening process took place in the reigns of James I and Charles I. By then the new landed gentry

and respectable traders wished to settle down to peaceful development and legitimate trade. "The new age had turned its back on the gold which did not come through chartered companies."¹ "Peace and law have beggared us all," wailed the future royalist Sir John Oglander.²

So the feudalists, as their incomes from land declined, became more and more dependent on the court for jobs and economic pickings, more and more parasitic. As the Stuart monarchy became progressively less useful to the bourgeoisie, so it became more indispensable to the feudalists, their only guarantee of economic survival. That is why they were to fight for it so desperately in the Civil War.

For the monarchy was bound up with the feudal order by more than the bonds of conservative sentiment. The King was himself the greatest of feudal landlords and, though he was in a better position than any other feudalist to get a rake-off from the new capitalist wealth, he was opposed no less than any other landowner to a fundamental change from a feudal to a capitalist order of society.

In the early sixteenth century the monarchy had used the bourgeoisie as an ally against its most powerful rivals—the other great feudal houses weakened by the Wars of the Roses and the Church. The alliance between Crown and Parliament (representing the landed classes and the merchants) had in the early sixteenth century been genuine. The new men prospered under the shelter of the throne; the monarchy defended them from internal reaction or revolt, as

¹ D. Mathew, *The Jacobean Age*, p. 16.

² Bamford, *A Royalist's Notebook*, p. 13.

when it defeated the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536) and the rising of the northern earls (1569). The Crown also defended them from the external reactionary power of Spain (the Armada). The only time when reaction seemed for a brief period likely to triumph was when Queen Mary was married to Philip of Spain; and then the terror and burnings with which alone her policy could be carried through helped to confirm the national hatred of Catholicism. So the collaboration between Crown and Parliament in the Tudor period was based on a community of real interests. The Parliamentary franchise was very restricted and the House of Commons represented exclusively the landed class and the merchants, whilst the House of Lords remained the more important chamber until the Commons seized the initiative in James I's reign. Parliament under the Tudors did not meet often, and then normally approved the royal policy.

But by the last decade of the sixteenth century, when all its internal and external foes had been crushed, the bourgeoisie ceased to depend on the protection of the monarchy; at the same time the Crown became increasingly aware of the dangerous possibilities of the growing wealth of the bourgeoisie, and strove to consolidate its position before it was too late.

This clash was reflected by the quarrels of James I and Charles I with their Parliaments. The change was in the relative strength of the class forces; James was sillier than Elizabeth, but this does not account for the failure of his policy where hers succeeded. James formulated grandiose theories of the divine right of kings where Elizabeth had preserved a prudent silence; but this is a symptom of the growing divergence between

Crown and Parliament, not a cause. James had to define his position because it was being called in question. The real crux of the problem was finance,⁶ over which there had already been conflict at the end of Elizabeth's reign. Prices were rising, the wealth of the bourgeoisie was increasing by leaps and bounds, yet the revenue of the Crown, as of all great landowners, remained static and inadequate to the new needs. Unless the Crown could tap the new wealth either (*a*) by drastically increasing taxation at the expense of the bourgeoisie and gentry, or (*b*) by somehow taking part in the productive process itself, its independent power must disappear.

The first policy—increased customs, forced loans, new taxes—led to violent quarrels with Parliament, which had long claimed the right to control taxation, and was not going to allow taxes to be increased unless it was given full control over the machinery of State.

The second policy led to the erection of monopolies in the attempt to control certain industries and obtain a *rentier's* rake-off from that control, e.g. coal, alum, cloth, etc. It outraged the whole business population, capitalists and employees alike. The scandal reached its height in "Cockayne's project" (1616). This was a scheme to bring the clothing industry under royal control and expand exports to the advantage of the Exchequer. It was sabotaged by the exporters, and led to a crisis of over-production and widespread unemployment, the blame for which attached itself to the Crown.

A third policy, tried by the Stuarts after all others had failed, never had a chance of success. This was an

attempt to revive and increase the revenue from feudal dues. There was no chance of the Crown becoming financially independent of the bourgeoisie from this source alone; the only consequence of its exploitation was the alienation of the Crown's potential friends, the feudalists, as well as of the bourgeoisie. For with the increasing economic difficulties, and the political threat from the bourgeoisie, the monarchy was thrown back on the exclusive support of the older nobility and the economically unprogressive, parasitic elements in the state. On the other side, the nobility itself came to depend more and more on the Crown's control of economic life to maintain its own position. It wanted Court patronage for its landless younger sons, whom bourgeois competition was driving out of the professions; it wanted privileges and monopolies which would give it a *rentier's* share in the profits of developing capitalism. It is not surprising that the major economic clashes of the early Stuart Parliaments were over this very issue of monopolies. They were the means by which the Stuart monarchy attempted to control and canalise commercial activity in the interests of the bankrupt courtiers, the "drones," in denunciation of whom Puritan sermons abounded.

Another great landowner remains to be considered, whose interests were even more closely bound up with those of the monarchy—the Church hierarchy. Since the dissolution of the monasteries, the remaining possessions of the Church of England were coveted by a section of the gentry. Only the usefulness of the bishops to the Crown protected the Church from further spoliation. Its moral authority, too, could now no longer be drawn from the international Papacy with

which Henry VIII had broken, but came from the national monarchy, its only defender against Catholic reaction and left-wing Protestant revolutionaries. So the Elizabethan Church stood for passive obedience to divinely constituted authority, and preached that rebellion was the worst possible sin. The dependence of the Church on the Crown was a century old by 1640, and their alliance was based on the closest community of interest. As the breach between Crown and bourgeoisie widened, so the Puritan attack on the Church, on its forms and ceremonies, its courts and discipline, became hardly distinguishable from the Parliamentary attack on the Crown. A group of merchants in London formed a society for establishing lectureships in the "barren parts" of the country, and lecturers nominated by town corporations incurred the special hostility of Charles I's Archbishop, Laud, who rightly suspected that their theology and political theory would be equally "unsound" from the point of view of the Government.

Two social systems and their ideologies were in conflict. Presbyterianism (which advocated abolition of the royally appointed bishops and the domination of each Church by elders—local bigwigs) was an oligarchical theory which especially appealed to the big bourgeoisie. What they wanted was a Church organised in such a way as to be capable of diffusing throughout the whole of society the political and economic ways of thinking convenient for the merchant class. For it has been abundantly demonstrated how the morality that Puritanism preached was precisely the outlook needed for the accumulation of capital and expansion of capitalism. The emphasis was on thrift,

sobriety, hard work in the station to which God had called a man; on unceasing labour in whatever calling, merchant or artisan, one happened to be, but with no extravagant enjoyment of the fruits of labour, and unceasing preoccupation with duty to the detriment of "worldly" pleasure. The wealthy were to accumulate capital, the poor to labour at their tasks—as a divine duty and always under the "great Task-master's" eye. This belief inspired the bourgeoisie to remodel society in the divinely ordained fashion as God's "elect," and if that fashion bore a striking resemblance to the capitalist system, they were ever more fervently convinced that they were doing the work of God and that ultimate victory was both predestined and assured. Their conviction of "salvation" was born of the historical necessity and progressiveness of their task and was confirmed by the material prosperity with which God tended to bless his servants.

The hierarchy counter-attacked by trying to recover some of the Church's lost revenues (tithes which had been "impropriated"—that is to say, diverted into the pockets of a lay landlord from the ecclesiastical purposes for which they had originally been charged on all occupiers of property). At the same time, it tried to recover its control over patronage, in order to appoint to Church livings socially and doctrinally satisfactory incumbents. "Subversive" views on doctrine and discipline were ruthlessly punished by the ecclesiastical Court of High Commission, with Laud at its head. The Puritan opposition depicted the whole trend of Charles's policy as a return to papistry, which is truer in spirit than in the letter. Laud was no doctrinal papist, and he refused all overtures from Rome; but the whole social

policy which he personified was an attempt to revive and perpetuate obsolete mediæval economic and social relations and the ways of thinking corresponding to them. Thus the fight to control the Church was of fundamental importance; whoever controlled its doctrine and organisation was in a position to determine the nature of society. James I was making a shrewd political analysis when he said, "No Bishop, no King." It was only three years after the abolition of episcopacy that Charles I died on the scaffold.

(b) Resistance to the Stuarts

The political struggle was waged in Parliament during the early years of the century. It covered many subjects—religious, economic, constitutional. With religion were confused questions of foreign policy. Since the war against the reactionary power of Spain and the defeat of the Armada, English Protestantism and English patriotism were closely connected. James outraged them both when, through fear of the revolutionary tendencies of extreme Protestantism in England and abroad, he drew closer to Spain. For many years the Spanish Ambassador Gondomar was the chief influence at James's Court, the best-hated man in England; and during those years Spanish diplomacy and Spanish armies advanced at the cost of Protestants all over the Continent. The bourgeoisie knew its friends. Against James's policy of appeasement, the House of Commons called for a militant anti-Spanish policy. But this was only to be secured after the downfall of the monarchy. Its foreign policy reflected the interests of reaction in England and Europe, and a fundamental reversal of foreign policy is possible only

by means of a fundamental change in the social system.

Meanwhile, in consequence, great opportunities for English expansion in the New World were lost; the carrying trade of Europe, for want of a forward policy, was lost to the bourgeois Dutch Republic, and English cloth was driven from German markets. Even when the Crown pursued a colonising policy and tried to enlist the support of the bourgeoisie—in Ireland—there were two divergent views on colonisation. James I envisaged the City's Londonderry Company as merely Government agents, whose job was to provide yeomen settlers to defend and police the conquered and occupied districts, whereas the City merchants wished to retain the "native Irish" as a source of cheap labour for absentee employers. The royal and feudalist conception of colonisation—emphasising strategic and policing considerations and the need for land for the impoverished gentry—clashed with the bourgeois vision of colonies as a source of steady profits. Charles I even further alienated the City by revoking the company's charter after £50,000 capital had been lost, and imposing a fine of £70,000 merely because the citizens had put profit before the letter of their obligations. (This, like other fines, was a useful windfall for the Government at the time, but did not make it much easier for the Crown subsequently to raise loans in the City. The fact that "there were no safe investments under the *ancien régime*" is always given as one of the causes of the French Revolution.) The later ruthless determination of the bourgeoisie to subjugate Ireland, leading up to Cromwell's conquest in 1649, dates back to the losses over the Londonderry plantation.

Foreign policy is linked up with finance as well as

with religion. James claimed that his weak foreign policy was due to lack of money, at a time when the bourgeoisie was becoming visibly richer. But there could be no financial concessions to a government which the moneyed classes did not trust. Over James's and Charles's attempts to replenish the Exchequer there were many clashes. Imports were taxed without consent of Parliament ("impositions"). Monopolies aimed at tapping industrial profits, and were declared illegal by Parliament. "Cockayne's project" for control of the export of cloth was an attempt at State capitalism. Its failure caused a grave economic crisis, and led in 1621 to the first large-scale denunciation of the whole economic policy of the Government and the surrender of James on that issue. Charles, who succeeded his father in 1625, used forced loans, backed up by arbitrary arrest of those who refused to pay (the Five Knights' Case).

This led to an open breach. In the Petition of Right, 1628, Parliament declared that taxation without its consent and arbitrary arrest were alike illegal; other clauses tried to make it impossible for the King to maintain a standing army. For that was clearly the direction in which the Government was tending. Charles accepted the Petition of Right perforce, but then immediately quarrelled with the Commons over its interpretation. In March, 1629, Parliament was dissolved by a sudden coup, but not before a violent scene in the Lower House in which resolutions were passed, aiming at making it impossible for the King to get in any revenue, and casting suspicion on his whole policy as "papist" and in the interest of foreign Powers.

The point had been reached beyond which the King could retreat no further without virtual abdication to the bourgeoisie. The situation was already revolutionary, but Charles had taken the initiative, and for eleven years he was able to try his hand at personal government. His ministers were not inefficient. There was Archbishop Laud in London. Sir Thomas Wentworth, leader of the Yorkshire gentry as opposed to the clothing interest in that county, whose compromising leadership had been rejected by the House of Commons in 1628, now came over openly to the King's side. He was made President of the Council in the North, later Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and Earl of Strafford. In Ireland he distinguished himself by brutal efficiency, and built up a powerful and papist army which struck terror into the hearts of English parliamentarians. The opposition was temporarily driven underground.

During these years England was at peace with the world, so the experiment of personal government was carried out under the most favourable circumstances. Yet Charles's system proved a total failure, and broke down of its own accord. The Government alienated all sections of the community. It annoyed the common lawyers by interfering with the judges to get the sort of legal decisions it wanted (James I had been guilty of this, too) and by relying on the prerogative courts (Star Chamber, Council in the North and in Wales) as instruments of policy.

These courts had been used by the Tudors, partly to deal with commercial causes which the common law was not competent to handle, partly to suppress feudal anarchy and maintain the order so necessary to a commercial civilisation. But during the Tudor period the

common law—product of a feudal society—had adapted itself to the needs of the business world, its personnel had come to be drawn largely from the bourgeoisie; and now that the dangers from baronial disorder no longer existed, the wide executive powers of the prerogative courts were looked upon with fear by the bourgeoisie, who no longer needed their protection and might become their victims. The judges in the Star Chamber were for all practical purposes almost identical with the Government in the Privy Council.

The bourgeoisie thus found willing allies in the lawyers, anxious for their fees, as well as in all those who detested the methods of the prerogative courts. The cutting off of Prynne's ears for writing a pamphlet which the Government held to have slighted the Queen, the flogging of Lilburne for distributing illegal literature, made the Government's victims popular heroes.

The financial expedients of Charles's personal Government affected all classes. Feudal dues were revived and extended and that hit landlords and their tenants. The decline of the Navy and attacks of pirates on shipping and coast towns were made the excuse for collecting ship-money. This was an obsolete national tax not voted by Parliament, falling especially on the towns and the gentry. Monopolies and the tightened grip of corrupt Court circles on the economic life of the country meant wealth for a small circle, but grave inconvenience for the vast mass of business men and small producers.

Monopolies were the most uneconomical form of taxation. It has been estimated that whereas every 6s. charged to the consumer by the Customs brought 5s.

into the Exchequer, 6s. increased cost to the consumer in monopolies brought about 10d. into the Exchequer. The rest went to the privileged group of Court parasites, who fulfilled no productive function themselves and were an enormous drag on the full development of the productive capacities of the country.¹ The soap monopoly severely hampered the woollen industry. The salt monopoly hit fish-curing. All industries suffered from a rise in the price of coal due to the Crown's alliance with a ring of exporters. Monopolies caused a sharp rise in prices all round, which hit the poor especially hard. There were monopolies (and therefore increased prices) on necessities, such as butter, herrings, salt, beer, soap and too many others to enumerate. "Is not bread there?" an indignant Member of Parliament demanded when the list was read out in 1601.

In face of these facts, the manoeuvres of the Government to enlist the support of the poorer peasants against their landlords deceived no one (except a recent school of reactionary historians)² and were not even effective. Commissions were set up to punish landlords whose enclosures had led to eviction, but the financial extremity of the Government was such that it could

¹ W. R. Scott, *Joint Stock Companies*, I, p. 221.

² They rely largely on the statement of the historian Clarendon that the period 1629-40 was one of great prosperity for the mass of the population. On this Thorold Rogers, the historian of prices, comments: "I am convinced, by comparison of wages, rents and prices, that it was a period of excessive misery among the mass of the people and the tenants, a time in which a few might have become rich, while the many were crushed down into hopeless and almost permanent indigence" (*The Economic Interpretation of History*, p. 139). Clarendon is hardly an impartial witness, for he had been the chief Councillor of Charles I and Charles II in exile, and was Charles II's first Minister after the Restoration, until the Parliamentary opposition drove him out of the country again in 1667. Of course he wanted to boost the old régime. He is refuted by the contemporary despatches of the Venetian Ambassador.

never resist the offer of rich men to buy themselves off. There were many people of admirable intentions in Charles's Government, but they were unable to make anything of the rotten system they were trying to work. This is especially clear in the case of Laud, whose views on the need for beauty and uniformity in church worship led him to violent persecution of his opponents, espionage and the throttling down of all criticism. Thus all honest Puritans were driven willy-nilly into political opposition, and even such a long-established custom as the payment of tithes to the established Church began to be widely called in question.

During these eleven years the opposition was organising itself as well as growing. Its centre was a group of landed families, closely connected by trade and intermarriage, who were always well represented in both Houses of Parliament. The sort of state they wanted could not be procured without the overthrow of the Laud-Strafford régime (though there were as yet few republicans).

The first great signal of revolt was John Hampden's refusal to pay Ship Money in 1637, and his trial and condemnation focused attention in a way that the more cruel imprisonment of Eliot and other Parliamentary leaders in 1629 had failed to do. (Eliot died in prison, as the Government intended him to do. On one occasion the Lieutenant of the Tower was severely reprimanded for allowing air from an open window to reach this dangerous prisoner.)

The bourgeoisie thus saw that their economic grievances could only be redressed by political action; the royal economic policies, hitting the capitalist class as a whole, could not be improved by the winning of small

privileges for particular members of the class. The demand for a business government, strong ever since the crisis of 1621, grew rapidly. Following Hampden's example, there was a general refusal to pay taxes in the years 1639-40. The bourgeoisie had gone on strike.

Meanwhile Charles's system had broken down at its weakest link—in Scotland. Scotland was a much more backward country than England economically, but politically the gentry had thrown off the control of Church, Crown and big aristocracy. Charles I attempted to reverse this achievement. His attempt to extend royal control over the Church of Scotland, and his threat to resume Church lands there, created a national revolt for which there was much sympathy in England. When a Scottish army invaded England in 1639, the absence of all popular support as well as sheer lack of means forced Charles to come to terms with it.

In the economic crisis of 1640 he was utterly bankrupt. He outraged commercial circles by seizing bullion deposited in the Tower and by proposing to debase the coinage. The State machine—which depended on the support of the middle-class J.Ps.—ceased to function. The Scots refused to leave England without an indemnity. The English army sent against them was mutinous and had to be paid. A Parliament could no longer be avoided. Even so Charles dissolved one Parliament after three weeks (the Short Parliament); but in November, 1640, the Long Parliament met, to which the Government had to surrender. Pym, Hampden and other Opposition leaders had stumped the country in a successful election campaign. They were helped by riots against enclosures in the countryside

and by mass demonstrations in the City. The last time the rack was used in England was to torture a youth who had led a procession to Lambeth to hunt "William the Fox" (Archbishop Laud).

This Parliament differed from its predecessors only in the length of its session. It represented the same classes—principally the gentry and wealthy merchants. Consequently, it came to reflect the division among the English gentry corresponding roughly to the economic division between feudal north-west and capitalist south-east.

But in 1640 most classes were united against the Crown. The final issues were: (*a*) destruction of the bureaucratic machinery whereby the Government had been able to rule in contravention of the desires of the great majority of its politically influential subjects (Strafford was executed, Laud imprisoned, other leading Ministers fled abroad; the Star Chamber, Court of High Commission, and other prerogative courts were abolished); (*b*) prevention of a standing army controlled by the King; (*c*) abolition of the recent financial expedients, whose aim had also been to render the King independent of the control of the bourgeoisie through Parliament, and whose effect had been economic dislocation and the undermining of confidence; (*d*) parliamentary (i.e. bourgeois) control of the Church, so that it could no longer be used as a reactionary propaganda agency.

A crisis was forced by a revolt in Ireland in 1641. With the withdrawal of Strafford, the English Government there, which had long been oppressive, ceased to be strong, and the Irish seized the opportunity to attempt to throw off the English yoke. Parliament was

united in its determination to keep the first British colony in subjection; but the bourgeoisie firmly refused to trust Charles with an army for its re-conquest (Royalist plots in the armed forces had already been exposed). So Parliament was reluctantly forced to take control of the Army.

The unanimity inside Parliament came to an end. To the old aristocracy and the unprogressive gentry, the policy of the leaders of the House of Commons, and especially their readiness to appeal to public opinion outside Parliament, seemed leading to a break-up of the social order in which their dominant position was secure, and they gradually fell back to support of the King. In the country as a whole, the division went along broad class lines. The landed class was divided, many being frightened by riots against enclosures and threats of a peasant revolt, such as had shaken the Midlands in 1607; the progressive section of the gentry and the bourgeoisie were confident that they could ride the storm. In London, the poor of the town gave active support to the forward party in Parliament, and pushed it steadily further along the revolutionary path. The great leader of the Commons, Pym, welcomed this support, and in the Grand Remonstrance (November, 1641) the revolutionary leaders drew up a sweeping indictment of Charles's Government, and published it for propaganda purposes—a new technique of appeal to the people.

But the decision to print the Remonstrance had been the occasion of a savage clash in the House and was passed by only eleven votes, after which the division became irreconcilable. The future Royalists withdrew from Parliament, not (as is often alleged) because of

their devotion to bishops, but rather (as a Member said in the debate) because, "if we make a parity in the Church we must come to a parity in the Commonwealth." If the property of the ecclesiastical landlords could be confiscated, whose turn might not come next? The big bourgeoisie itself was frightened, and felt the need of some kind of monarchical settlement (with a reformed monarchy responsive to its interests) to check the flow of popular feeling. It tried desperately to stem the revolutionary torrent it had let loose. "Rich men," a pamphleteer ironically observed later, "are none of the greatest enemies to monarchy."¹ But this hesitation only encouraged the King to refuse all overtures; and in the summer of 1642 war began.

In time of war men must choose one side or the other. But even when fighting had actually started, the dividing issues were obscured for contemporaries (and for many historians) by the fact that many of the hated State officials were also officials of the national Church. And for the Church much traditional and sentimental popularity could be worked up. Many of the Parliamentarians, moreover, tended to speak as though they thought the most important part of their struggle the ideological battle of Puritanism against an Anglicanism that was barely distinguishable from Catholicism. But their actions make it clear that they knew what was really at stake.

The issue was one of political power. The bourgeoisie had rejected Charles I's Government, not because he was a bad man, but because he represented an obsolete social system. His Government tried to perpetuate a feudal social order when the conditions existed for free

¹ P. Chamberlen, *The Poore Man's Advocate*, 1649, p. 21.

capitalist development, when the increase of national wealth could only come by means of free capitalist development.

Charles's whole policy follows from the class basis of his rule and of the support which he received. He tried to regulate trade and industry, partly to slow down a too rapid capitalist development, partly to share in its profits. In foreign policy he wished for the alliance of the most reactionary powers, Spain and Austria, and refused therefore the forward national policy demanded by the commercial interests. Because he lost all favour with the moneyed classes, he had to levy illegal taxes, to aim to dispense with Parliament, to rule by force. His failure in Scotland showed up the rottenness of the whole structure which he had reared; and his appeals for national unity against the foreign enemy fell on deaf ears. The real enemy was at home. The Parliamentary attack showed that the opposition had realised that they were fighting more than a few evil counsellors (as they had long believed or pretended to believe), more even than the King himself. They were fighting a system. Before the social order they needed could be secure they had to smash the old bureaucratic machinery, defeat the feudalists in battle. The heads of a king and many peers had to roll in the dust before it could be certain that future kings and the peerage would recognise the dominance of the new class.

For many years during and after the Civil War, in their eagerness to defeat the old order the moneyed classes willingly accepted taxes three and four times as heavy as those they had refused to pay to Charles I. For the objection was not to taxes as such; it was to the whole policy to implement which those taxes were

collected. The bourgeoisie had no confidence in Charles, would not trust him with money, because they knew that the whole basis of his rule was hostility to their development. But to a government of their own kind the purse-strings were at once loosed.

Nor was it a war of the rich only. All sections of society in southern and eastern England brought in their contributions to help the overthrow of the feudal social order, for in that overthrow men saw the essential preliminary condition of social and intellectual advance. Many of those who fought for Parliament were afterwards disappointed with the achievements of the revolution, felt they had been betrayed. But they were right to fight. A victory for Charles I and his gang could only have meant the economic stagnation of England, the stabilisation of a backward feudalism in a commercial age, and have necessitated an even bloodier struggle for liberation later. The Parliamentarians thought they were fighting God's battles. They were certainly fighting those of posterity, throwing off an intolerable incubus to further advance. The fact that the revolution might have gone further should never allow us to forget the heroism and faith and disciplined energy with which ordinary decent people responded when in the interests of smashing the old order the Parliament's leaders freely and frankly appealed to them to support its cause.

4. THE REVOLUTION

ONCE the war against the King had begun, divisions arose inside and outside Parliament as to the mode of conducting it. The Cavaliers, as the troops of the Royalist gentry came to be called, had certain military advantages. The Roundheads (there is a social sneer in the name) were strongest in the towns, and though the burghers brought wealth to the cause, they were not at first experienced fighting men. The Cavaliers, on the other hand, relied mainly on the north and west of England, economically backward and badly policed; they, with their tenants and dependents, were used to hard riding and fighting.

Yet for a long time Parliament tried to fight the Cavaliers with their own weapons—by calling out the feudal militia in the counties loyal to Parliament, by using the old financial and administrative machinery of the counties to run the war. But by this means the real resources of Parliament were not drawn upon—the vast wealth of London, the administrative abilities of the bourgeoisie, especially the initiative and resource of the masses of ordinary people who staunchly supported the cause, but were thwarted by the caste system of officering the militia and by its local loyalties. A royalist advance on London was only checked by the obstinate resistance of three great ports—Hull, Plymouth and Gloucester—and by the bold front presented by the citizens of London at Turnham Green (1642) and their daring march to the relief of Gloucester.

But these spontaneous efforts were inadequately co-ordinated.

Oliver Cromwell first showed his genius in overcoming these weaknesses and showing that a revolutionary war must be organised in a revolutionary way. In his force in the eastern counties promotion came by merit, not birth: "I had rather have a plain russet coated captain," he said, "that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows, than that which you call 'a gentleman' and is nothing else."¹ He insisted on his men having "the root of the matter" in them; otherwise he encouraged free discussion of divergent views. Cromwell had to fight those of his superior officers who would not adopt the democratic method of recruitment and organisation whose advantages he had shown. (This conflict is usually described in our school histories as one between "Presbyterians" and "Independents.") It will be useful to retain these terms, but religion had little to do with it except in so far as Cromwell advocated freedom of assembly and expression, i.e. "religious toleration"; the real difference was between the win-the-war party and the compromisers. It was, in fact, a class split—between the big trading bourgeoisie and that section of the aristocracy and big landowners whose interests were bound up with them—"Presbyterians"—and the progressive smaller gentry, yeomen, free-trade bourgeoisie, supported by the masses of smaller peasants and artisans—"Independents" and "Sectaries.") Many of the great "Presbyterian" commanders did not want to beat the King too thoroughly. "If we beat the King ninety and nine times, yet he is King still," said the Earl of Manchester, Cromwell's

¹ Carlyle, *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, ed. Lomas, I, p. 154.

general. "My Lord," Cromwell replied, "if this be so, why did we take up arms at first?"¹

The "Presbyterians" were afraid of the flood of radical democracy to which a frank appeal to the people against the King might expose them. Cromwell himself was alleged to have said, "There would never be a good time in England till we have done with Lords." Certainly many of his troops were thinking so. The Independent and Sectarian congregations were the way in which ordinary people organised themselves in those days to escape from the propaganda of the established Church and discuss the things they wanted to discuss in their own way. The Presbyterian Edwards gave as one of the "heresies" of the Sectaries the view that "by natural birth all men are equally and alike born to like property, liberty and freedom."² These were the small people, whose intellectual vision was not restricted by anxieties for their own property. They were invaluable for their enthusiasm, courage and morale in the army; but they came to produce what their paymasters regarded as dangerous social ideas.

Such were the difficulties the bourgeoisie experienced even at the beginning of its career; it needed the people and yet feared them, and wanted to keep the monarchy as a check against democracy—if only Charles I would act as they wanted him to, as Charles II later did.

The "Presbyterians" wanted to rely principally upon the professional Scottish army to bear the brunt of the fighting. But after the great victory of Marston Moor, won in 1644 by Cromwell's genius and the discipline of his yeomen cavalry, he forced the issue. "It is now a

¹ Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, ed. 1893, II. p. 59.

² *Gangrena*, III, p. 16A.

time to speak or for ever to hold the tongue," he said in Parliament. A democratic reorganisation was necessary for victory over the more experienced fighters on the Royalist side, and the tax-paying classes were becoming irritated at the slow and dilatory tactics of the aristocratic "Presbyterian" commanders, which increased the cost of the war.

These considerations caused Cromwell's views to prevail, and by the "Self-Denying Ordinance" all Members of Parliament were called upon to lay down their commands (April, 1645). This hit principally the peers, and the abandonment of their traditional right to command the armed forces of the country was in itself a minor social revolution. The New Model Army of the career open to the talents was formed, nationally organised, financed by a new national tax.

This in its turn led to corresponding changes in the State machinery. The destruction of the royal bureaucracy had left a void which was ultimately to be filled by a new middle-class civil service. But meanwhile, pressure of revolutionary necessity had led to the creation of a series of revolutionary committees in the localities. "We had a thing here called a Committee," wrote a despondent gentleman in the Isle of Wight, "which overruled Deputy-Lieutenants and also Justices of the Peace, and of this we had brave men: Ringwood of Newport, the pedlar: Maynard, the apothecary: Matthews, the baker: Wavell and Legge, farmers; and poor Baxter of Hurst Castle. These ruled the whole Island, and did whatsoever they thought good in their own eyes."¹ These committees were now organised and centralised and all brought under the unifying control

¹ Barnford, *A Royalist's Notebook*, p. 110.

of the great committees of Parliament, which really ran the Civil War—the committee of both kingdoms, the committee for advance of money, the committee for compounding, etc. The old State system was not wholly but partially destroyed and modified; new institutions were being built up under pressure of events.

In the military sense the war was won by artillery (which money alone could buy) and by Cromwell's yeomen cavalry. Under Prince Rupert, the cavaliers charged with vigour and desperation, but they were totally undisciplined, split up for plunder after the first charge. In war as in peace, the feudal gentry could never resist the prospect of loot. But Cromwell's humbler horsemen had a discipline that was irresistible because it was self-imposed. Thanks to the complete freedom of discussion which existed in the army, they "knew what they were fighting for and loved what they knew." So they charged home, knee to knee, reserving their fire till the last moment, then reformed and charged again and again until the enemy was broken. The Parliament's battles were won because of the discipline and unity and high political consciousness of the masses organized in the New Model Army.

Once properly organised and regularly paid, with an efficient commissariat and technical staff, with Cromwell, the indispensable leader, reappointed to his command, the New Model Army advanced rapidly to victory and the Royalists were decisively routed at Naseby (1645). After that the war soon ended. A Royalist commander, surrendering, said: "You have done your work and may go play—unless you fall out among yourselves."

That was the danger. For once the fighting was over,

the "Presbyterian" compromisers began to raise their heads again, inside and outside Parliament. Charles had surrendered to the Scottish army in 1646, who sold him to the English Parliament. Thereupon the "Presbyterians" began to negotiate with the captive King: they proposed to get rid of the victorious Army by sending it to conquer Ireland, without paying its wages; they produced no social reforms, not even an indemnity for actions committed during the war, so that many soldiers were actually brought before the courts for what they had done in the service of Parliament.

But as the opponents of the New Model Army had anticipated, the people were not so easily to be fobbed off, once they were armed and given the chance of organisation. The main obstacle to a peasant and artisan population in making its will felt is the difficulty of organising the petty bourgeoisie; but the Army supplied a centre, and in London a political party sprang up to represent the views of the small producers, which got into touch with the Army-agitation. These were the Levellers.

The trouble came to a head in the Army in the summer of 1647 with the attempt to disband regiments and form new ones for the Irish service. Led by the yeomen cavalry, the rank and file organised themselves, appointed deputies from each regiment ("agitators," they were called) to a central council, pledged themselves to maintain solidarity and not disband until their demands were satisfied. There was a high degree of organisation—a party chest and levy on members, a printing press, contacts with London, with the other armies and garrisons, and with the fleet. The initiative

in this mass movement seems undoubtedly to have come from the rank and file, though many of the lower officers co-operated enthusiastically from the start. The general officers ("grandeess" as the Levellers called them) hesitated for a time, tried to mediate between the "Presbyterian" majority in Parliament and the Army rank and file. Then, when they saw the latter were determined to proceed, they threw themselves in with the movement and henceforth concentrated on guiding its energies into their own channels. They worked principally to restrict the soldiers' demands to the professional and political and to minimise the social and economic programme which the Levellers tried to graft on to the rank-and-file movement.

Army and Parliament now existed side by side as rival powers in the State. At a general rendezvous in June, 1647, the whole Army took a solemn "Engagement" not to divide until the liberties of England were secure. An Army Council was set up in which elected representatives of the rank and file sat side by side with officers to decide questions of policy. England has never again seen such democratic control of the Army as existed for the next six months. In order to stop the "Presbyterians" in Parliament coming to an agreement with the King behind the backs of the Army, Cornet Joyce was sent by the agitators (though probably with Cromwell's connivance) to seize Charles. Then, holding the King as a bargaining weapon, the Army marched on London. The principal "Presbyterian" leaders withdrew from the House of Commons, leaving Cromwell and the "Independents" temporarily in control; the Army was in a position decisively to influence policy.

That was as much as the gentlemen "Independents"

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wanted. They had removed their main rivals and were perfectly satisfied with the old system (with or without the King). They had no desire to modify it further, so long as they had the running of it. But the petty bourgeoisie, whose interests were more and more being expressed by the Levellers, wanted vast changes. And Leveller influence was growing rapidly in the Army. They wanted complete free trade for small producers, as well as the freedom of the big merchant companies from the corrupt monopolies which Parliament had already abolished; they wanted disestablishment of the Church and the abolition of tithes; security of small property and reform of the debtors' law; and to secure all this they wanted a republic, extension of the parliamentary franchise, household suffrage.

These were the points at issue in debates of the Army Council held at Putney in October and November, 1647, on the proposed Leveller constitution, the Agreement of the People. The Leveller Rainborowe wanted manhood suffrage, because he thought "the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he."¹ Ireton, Cromwell's son-in-law, summed up the Grandees' case when he said: "In a general sense liberty cannot be provided for if property be preserved."² An attempted mutiny by the Levellers in the Army was defeated by the Grandees at Ware in November, 1647, and resulted in the dispersal of the Army Council and the end of Army democracy. But in the same month the King escaped from captivity, civil war broke out again in the following May, and this reunited the Army behind Cromwell.

¹ *Clarke Papers*, I, p. 301. Rainborowe was subsequently assassinated by Royalist desperadoes.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 327.

After the Army's victory in this second civil war, Grandees and Levellers united to clear the compromisers out of Parliament (Pride's Purge) and to bring the King to justice. After a speedy trial, he was executed on January 30th, 1649, as a "public enemy to the good people of this nation." Monarchy was declared to be "unnecessary, burdensome, and dangerous to the liberty, safety and public interest of the people," and was abolished. The House of Lords, which was also abolished, was merely "useless and dangerous." On May 19th, 1649, a republic was proclaimed. But the Agreement of the People, the extension of the franchise, the economic and social demands of the Levellers, were as far from attainment as ever; they felt they had been betrayed. The Grandees were able to provoke them into an unsuccessful revolt, which was isolated and put down and its leaders shot at Burford in May, 1649.

It is not difficult to account for the failure of the Levellers. Their demands were those of the petty bourgeoisie, a class always unstable and difficult to organise because of its dependence, economic and ideological, on the big bourgeoisie (cf. the impotence of present-day liberal morality to control a rapidly changing world). Moreover, the petty bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century was in the process of stratification. For if some of the richer yeomen and artisans were prospering and pushing their way up into the bourgeoisie and gentry, many more were being squeezed down to the status of landless agricultural labourers. The events of the Civil War speeded up this process. Many of the most successful and influential members of the petty bourgeoisie found they had

interests in common with those of the bourgeoisie, like the *kulaks* in the Russian Revolution. Both, for instance, welcomed enclosure and production for the market. Consequently this section deserted the Leveller movement as soon as it ceased to be merely the most revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie and began itself to attack the big bourgeoisie. The section which was sinking in the social scale tended to be erratic, despairing and defeatist. The Leveller ideal was a small-producer's Utopia in economics and petty-bourgeois democracy in politics. Despite the focus of the Army, the Levellers never represented a sufficiently homogeneous class to be able to achieve their aims. The full realisation of the democratic tasks even of the bourgeois revolution is impossible unless there is a working class able to carry them out. The most radical achievements of the English bourgeois revolution (abolition of the monarchy, confiscation of Church, Crown and aristocratic estates) were put through by what Engels called the "plebeian methods" of the Levellers and "Independents"; but there was no organised working-class movement, with a vision of a different form of social order and a scientific revolutionary theory, to lead the petty bourgeoisie to a frontal attack on the power of big capital. After the Burford shootings, the Leveller movement degenerated. Many of its leaders turned careerist or speculated in land; others took to terrorism, sometimes even in agreement with the Royalists. Many more had their energies diverted by the radical religious movements which date from this period—notably the pacifist Quakers, the anarchist Anabaptists and Fifth Monarchists.

The nearest the English bourgeois revolution got to

an independent proletarian movement was the Digger movement. This was an attempt to proceed by direct action to a form of agrarian communism by members of the dispossessed rural proletariat, who argued that lords of manors had been defeated as well as the King, that the victory of the people had freed the land of England, which was now theirs to cultivate.

Transferring Rainborowe's slogan from politics to economics, Winstanley wrote: "The poorest man hath as true a title and just right to the Land, as the richest man."¹ In the spring of 1649 a group of Diggers began to dig up the waste land on St. George's Hill in Surrey. Indignant local freeholders and parsons called in the soldiery, and the communistic colony was ultimately dispersed. There were similar attempts in Kent, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, but the movement reached no great dimensions, representing as it did a small if growing class; its weakness is evidenced in the pacifism and passive resistance its leaders preached.

Nevertheless, there is much in the theoretical teaching of Gerrard Winstanley that is a very interesting anticipation of historical materialism and scientific communism. The clear and simple statements have a contemporary ring: "This is the bondage the poor complain of, that they are kept poor by their brethren in a land where there is so much plenty for everyone."² "Every one talks of freedom, but there are but few that act for freedom, and the actors for freedom are oppressed by the talkers and verbal professors of freedom." For "it is clearly seen that if we be suffered

¹ Ed. Hamilton, *Selections from the Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, p. 69.

² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

to speak, we shall batter to pieces all the old laws, and prove the maintainers of them hypocrites and traitors to the commonwealth of England."¹ The Diggers were largely influenced by memories of the feudal and pre-feudal past; but Winstanley also had glimpses of a future in which "wheresoever there is a people united by common community of livelihood into oneness it will be the strongest land in the world, for there they will be as one man to defend their inheritance."²

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The history of the English Revolution from 1649 to 1660 can be briefly told. Cromwell's shooting of the Levellers at Burford made a restoration of monarchy and feudalists ultimately inevitable, for the breach of big bourgeoisie and gentry with the popular forces meant that their government could only be maintained either by an army (which in the long run proved crushingly expensive as well as difficult to control) or by a compromise with the surviving representatives of the old order. But first there were still tasks for the army to do.

(1) There was the conquest of Ireland, the expropriation of its landowners and peasantry—the first big triumph of British imperialism and the first big defeat of English democracy. For the petty bourgeoisie of the Army, despite the warnings of many of the Leveller leaders, allowed themselves to be distracted from establishing their own liberties in England and, deluded by religious slogans, to destroy those of the Irish. Many of them set up as landed

¹ Ed. Hamilton, *Selections from the Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, pp. 68, 74.

² *Ibid.*, p. 42. (See also Miss James's article in this volume.)

proprietors in Ireland. (The Leveller revolt of 1649 had been occasioned by the refusal of many of the rank and file to leave for Ireland, for that meant violating their Engagement of 1647 not to divide until the liberties of England were secure.)

(2) There was the conquest of Scotland, necessary to prevent a restoration of feudalism thence; Scotland was opened up to English traders by political union.

(3) A forward commercial policy was undertaken with the Navigation Act of 1651, the basis of England's commercial prosperity in the next century. This aimed at winning the carrying trade of Europe for English ships, and at excluding all rivals from trade with England's colonies. It led to a war with the Dutch, who had monopolised the carrying trade of the world in the first half of the seventeenth century. For in that period the royal policy had frustrated all attempts of the trading classes to throw the resources of England into an effective struggle for this trade. In this war, thanks to Blake's fleet and the economic strength the Republican Government was able to mobilise, England was victorious.

(4) An imperialist policy needed the strong Navy which Charles had failed to build up, and under Blake the Commonwealth began to rule the waves to some purpose; war in alliance with France against Spain brought Jamaica and Dunkirk to England.

(5) A violent restoration of the old order at home was made impossible by demolishing fortresses, disarming the Cavaliers, and taxing them to the verge of ruin, so that many were forced to sell their estates and with them their claim to social prestige and political power. For the vast number of owners of undeveloped lands who were already desperately in debt, the period of the Commonwealth represented a great foreclosing on mortgages, capital at last getting

its own back against improvident landlords whom the old law had protected.

(6) Finally, to finance all this, the lands of Church and Crown and of many leading Royalists were sold to speculators; smaller Royalists whose estates had been confiscated were allowed to "compound" for them by paying a fine equal to a substantial proportion of their estates (and they again were thus compelled to sell a part of their property privately to be able to keep the remainder).

If we keep these points in mind, there is no need to go into the detailed political revolutions of the next eleven years. Cromwell dissolved the Long Parliament forcibly in 1653, nominated a convention of his own adherents (the Barebones Parliament), which revived the social and economic demands of the petty bourgeoisie and had to be hastily dissolved. Cromwell was then (1653) proclaimed Protector under a Constitution (the "Instrument of Government"), which was rigged to conceal the dictatorship of the Army officers. He called a Parliament under this constitution on a new £200 franchise, by which moneyed men were admitted and the lesser yeomen excluded. But Parliament and Army quarrelled, Parliament was dissolved, and a period of naked military dictatorship followed under the Major-Generals, in which the Cavaliers were finally disarmed. Ultimately Cromwell and his Court circle (representing especially the new civil service), under pressure from the City, came to realise that the Army had done its job and that its maintenance now meant a crushing burden of taxation on the country, for which no compensating advantages were obtained.

Moreover, despite repeated purges and the drafting of

politically unreliable units to fight in Ireland, Jamaica, Flanders, the Leveller and democratic tradition remained strong in the Army. So in 1657 Cromwell surrendered to his second Parliament and accepted a new parliamentary constitution. This constitution (the "Humble Petition and Advice") took executive power from a council representing the Army Grandees and placed it in one controlled by Parliament, brought the Army under Parliament's financial control, made the protectorate hereditary and the protector subject to Parliamentary control. The new constitution was introduced by a City Member, and was supported by many former Presbyterians who were soon to welcome home Charles II. Mass protests in the Army only just prevented Oliver accepting the Crown as King. The Grandees were bought off by being given seats in a new second chamber.

But Cromwell died in 1658 before this constitution was working satisfactorily; his son and successor, Richard Cromwell, lacked his influence with the Army; and the Petition and Advice constitution was so like a monarchy that it was clear that the bourgeoisie would accept Charles II if he would accept them, and if the Army could be disposed of. When the Grandees deposed Richard Cromwell in a palace revolution and seized power for themselves, a revulsion occurred. The English army of occupation in Scotland, under command of the ex-Royalist adventurer General Monck, had hitherto taken no part in English political intrigues. Monck had concentrated on purging it of left-wing elements and enforcing "discipline." Now he became the hope of the conservative classes in the State, frightened of the radicalism of the English

armies. Monck took charge of the situation. With the approval and financial backing of the Scottish gentry, he marched down from Scotland with his purged and disciplined army, and declared for a free Parliament elected on the old franchise, to the applause of the bourgeoisie and gentry. For all knew that a "free" Parliament meant the dominance of the landed classes. "Freedom" is a relative term. This Parliament recalled Charles II in May, 1660.

That is very briefly what happened. Now let us try to see why it happened. The most conspicuous feature of the 'fifties is the growing conservatism of the "Independent" leaders; their increasing fear of social revolution as they themselves became sated and reassimilated to the "Presbyterians." This is especially evident in the class split within the Army (so powerful through its unity in 1647-8). After the breach with the Levellers, the scramble for confiscated lands had helped to widen this split, for officers had bought lands with debentures (promises to pay wages) purchased at a discount from their troops. The rank and file, after receiving a piece of paper in lieu of wages for risking their lives in the Parliament's cause, were lucky if they got 7s. 6d. in the £1 for those pieces of paper. Many got far less—1s. 6d. or 2s. But for those who were rich enough to be able to wait, the "debentures" were a profitable investment. After 1657 the lower officers also felt themselves betrayed by the Grandees, who had sold out for seats in the new Upper House. Fear of the possibility of a political reunion between lower officers and Army rank and file helps to account for the haste with which Charles II was scrambled home.

For by 1654 the sales of land were completed; a new class of landowners had appeared, who now wanted peace and order to develop their property. The "Independent" gentry—Oliver Cromwell's class—had been the spearhead of the revolution because they wanted to abolish the monopoly of social and political privileges attached to *feudal* landholding and to extend them to the advantage of their own class. They had no desire to abolish big property in land as such, and the left-wing parties advocating this ceased to be useful allies and became dangerous foes as the "Independent" gentry succeeded to the position of the old ruling class. The attack on tithes made the owners of impropriations¹ see unsuspected virtues even in the old Church establishment, whilst the "excesses" of the democratic sects—Quakers and the like—made the squirearchy yearn for an established State Church, uniform and disciplined and undemocratic.

In industry the interregnum saw attempts to organise small producers ("the yeomanry") against the power of merchant capital. In a bitter class struggle, wages were forced up. Add to this the financial difficulties, the arbitrary taxation which the Government was forced to impose after the exhaustion of the land fund (for Parliament refused to vote taxes for the Army) and we can understand the willingness of the new ruling class to compromise with the old, to agree to a restoration of the old law to guarantee the new order. Thus there was no reform of the legal system in the English Revolution comparable to the *Code Napoléon* which the French Revolution produced for the protection of small property.

¹ See p. 45.

The Restoration, then, was by no means a restoration of the old order. It is evidence, not of the weakness of the bourgeoisie and gentry, but of their strength. The personnel of the Civil Service, judicial bench, Government financiers continued with very little change after 1660. Charles II came back, and pretended he had been King by divine hereditary right ever since his father's head had fallen on the scaffold at Whitehall. But he was not restored to his father's old position. The prerogative courts were not restored, and so Charles had no independent executive authority.¹ The common law triumphed, and after 1701 subordination of judges to Parliament was a point of the Constitution: the gentry dominated local government as Justices of the Peace. The King had no power of taxation independently of Parliament (though by a lack of foresight Parliament in its enthusiasm voted Charles the Customs revenue for life, and such was the expansion of trade in his reign that towards the end of it he came near to financial independence. This was rectified after 1688). Charles was called King by the Grace of God, but was really King by the grace of the merchants and squires. He himself recognised this when he said he didn't want to go on his travels again. James II was less wise in recognising the limitations of his position—and he travelled.

The bishops also came home with the King, but the Church did not regain its old independent power, nor its monopoly in the manufacture of public opinion. The Court of High Commission was not restored; the

¹ The executive was controlled first by the impeachment of Ministers when Parliament disapproved of their conduct, then by the development of the cabinet system.

lesser ecclesiastical courts ceased to be able to get their sentences enforced; Convocation abandoned its claim to tax the clergy independently of Parliament. The Church of England ceased even to pretend to be all-embracing and aimed at holding Nonconformists in subjection rather than at reabsorbing them. It ceased to be an instrument of power, and became the hallmark of respectability. The recognised existence of Nonconformity dates from the Restoration: State and Church were no longer identical. A separate lower middle-class culture grew up. No longer a powerful organ of government at the disposal of the King, the Church of England sank to be merely the richest of many rival religious organisations. And it too became dependent on Parliament. The bishops had been Charles I's most faithful tools; it was the bishops who first refused obedience to James II.

Some of the big Royalists were restored to their estates, though not very many; Church and Crown lands were restored, too. But the vastly larger mass of smaller Royalists, who had sold their estates privately after ruining themselves in the cause, got no redress. And even where landowners were restored, they were not restored on the old conditions. Feudal tenures had been abolished in 1646, and confirmation of this abolition was the first business Parliament turned its attention to after recalling the King in 1660; land became a commodity that could be freely bought and sold. Between 1646 and 1660, moreover, the backward lands had passed into the possession of speculative purchasers, mostly bourgeois, who had improved cultivation, enclosed, racked rents, jerked the estates up to the market level. The returned Royalists had perforce to

adapt themselves to the new free market conditions, i.e. to turn themselves into *capitalist* farmers of their estates, or they went under in the competitive struggle.

Many of the landowners restored in 1660 had mortgaged and resold their estates by the end of the century. Among these landowners we must include the King, who henceforth became dependent on a Parliamentary civil list, a salaried official, the first Civil Servant. The King could no longer "live of his own" on his private income from his estates and feudal dues, and so could never be independent again. In the eighteenth century he had influence but no independent power. On the other hand, the failure of the democratic movement to win legally watertight security of tenure for small peasant proprietors had left the door open for ruthless racking of rents, enclosures, evictions, the creation of a landless proletariat, with no redress from a Parliament and a judicial system dominated by the landed classes.

In the business world, monopolies and royal control of industry and trade disappear for ever. Guilds and apprentice laws had broken down in the interregnum, and no effective attempt was made to revive them. Liberated trade and industry expanded rapidly. There was no break in commercial policy at the Restoration. The Navigation Act was renewed by Charles II's Government and became the backbone of English policy, the means by which the English merchants monopolised the wealth of the colonies. The exclusive trading companies declined, except where special circumstances made their retention necessary to the bourgeoisie (the East India Company). The complete domination of the moneyed interests was not established

till after the second revolution in 1688, with the foundation of the Bank of England and the National Debt (1694). The years from 1660 to 1688 are a period of retrenchment, in which wealth was accumulated to finance grandiose imperialist policies which the Protectorate had undertaken and been unable to carry through. By the end of the century they were being resumed, now under the complete control of a Parliament representing landed and moneyed interests fundamentally united by their similar ways of producing wealth.

Technology likewise benefited enormously by the liberation of science and by the stimulus to free thought and experiment which the Revolution gave. The revolutions in industrial and agrarian technique which were to change the face of England in the eighteenth century would have been impossible without the political revolution of the seventeenth century. The freedom of intellectual speculation in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England enormously influenced the ideas of the French Revolution of 1789.

In 1660 passive obedience was preached in all pulpits; a King was brought back "with plenty of holy oil about him," because this was necessary for Parliament, for the possessing classes, threatened by social revolution from below. A white terror was introduced by the returned *émigrés*, and an attempt was made to drive from political life all who did not accept the restored régime in Church and State (the Clarendon Code, the Test Act). Educational advances, like the purge which had made Oxford a centre of scientific research, were reversed. All this effectively broke the revolutionary-democratic movement. A Presbyterian

minister, who was deprived of his living by the Restoration, nevertheless wrote in words that recapture the fears of many respectable members of the possessing classes:

"Though soon after the settlement of the nation we saw ourselves the despised and cheated party . . . yet in all this I have suffered since, I look upon it as less than my trouble was from my fears then. . . . Then we lay at the mercy and impulse of a giddy, hot-headed, bloody multitude."¹

Many Presbyterians conformed to the Church of England, now again fashionable. But the very parsons and gentry who preached passive obedience to constituted authority in 1660 united to expel James II in 1688, when he made the mistake of taking these theories at their face value and threatened to restore the old absolutist monarchy. James was hustled out by the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, "glorious" because bloodless and because there was no social disorder, no "anarchy," no possibility of a revival of revolutionary-democratic demands.

Ever since then orthodox historians have done their utmost to stress the "continuity" of English history, to minimise the revolutionary breaks, to pretend that the "interregnum" (the word itself shows what they are trying to do) was an unfortunate accident, that in 1660 we returned to the old Constitution normally developing, that 1688 merely corrected the aberrations of a deranged King. Whereas, in fact, the period 1640-60 saw the destruction of a whole social order—feudalism—and the introduction of a political structure within which capitalism could freely develop. For tactical

¹ H. Newcome, *Autobiography*, I, pp. 118-19 (Chetham Soc., Vol. 26).

reasons, the ruling class in 1660 *pretended* that they were merely restoring the old forms of the Constitution. But they intended by that restoration to give sanctity and social stamp to a new social order. The important thing is that the social order was new and would not have been won without revolution.

"If writings be true," said the Leveller Rainborowe in 1647, "there hath bin many scufflings between the honest men of England and those that have tyrannised over them; and if it be read, there is none of those just and equitable laws that the people of England are born to but that they are intrenchment altogether. But . . . if the people find that they are not suitable to freemen as they are, I know no reason should deter me . . . from endeavouring by all means to gain anything that might be of more advantage to them than this government under which they live."¹

It is struggle that wins reforms, just as it is struggle that will retain the liberties which our ancestors won for us. And if the people find the legal system "not suitable to freedom as it is," then it can be changed by united action. That is the lesson of the seventeenth century for to-day. It was of us that Winstanley was thinking when he wrote at the head of one of his most impassioned pamphlets:

*"When these clay bodies are in grave, and children stand
in place,
This shews we stood for truth and peace, and freedom in
our days."*²

¹ *Clarke Papers*, I, p. 246.

² Winstanley, *Selections*, p. 66.

"Freedom," he added with a bitterness born of experience, but also with pride and confidence, "freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down, therefore no wonder he hath enemies." And freedom for Winstanley was not a cheap politician's slogan: it meant the living struggle of comrades to build a society based on communal ownership, a society which ordinary people would think worth defending with all their might because it was *their* society. "True freedom lies in the community in spirit and community in the earthly treasury."¹

"This commonwealth's freedom will unite the hearts of Englishmen together in love, so that if a foreign enemy endeavour to come in, we shall all with joint consent rise up to defend our inheritance, and shall be true to one another. Whereas now the poor see, if they fight and should conquer the enemy, yet either they or their children are like to be slaves still, for the gentry will have all."²

"Property . . . divides the whole world into parties, and is the cause of all wars and bloodshed and contention everywhere."

"When the earth becomes a common treasury again, as it must . . . then this enmity in all lands will cease."³

We still have much to learn from the seventeenth century.

¹ Winstanley, *Selections*, pp. 67-8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 38.

II

CONTEMPORARY MATERIALIST INTERPRETATIONS OF SOCIETY IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

IT is a truism, accepted by none more fully than by Marxists, that the particular facts discovered by a researcher depend on the bias, conscious or unconscious, of his interests. One would not expect Mr. John Buchan or Professor Feiling, for instance, to discover Marxian anticipations during the English Revolution. Conversely, it is all too easy for anyone interested in Marxian interpretations to discover them where they do not really exist. It is perhaps worth noting that it was while studying the seventeenth century for quite different purposes that the present writer was struck by the recurrence of contemporary statements and theories which, allowing for differences of setting and period, bear a striking resemblance to those enunciated two centuries later by Marx. On reflection, such resemblance is by no means inexplicable. The mid-seventeenth century in England was a middle-class revolutionary period, which, while it was by no means identical with that which confronted Marx in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, did on a more limited stage and in less advanced form anticipate some of the same features. Hence the keenest intellects and most advanced revolutionaries of the time (the two

were not always coincident) came to some of the same interpretations and conclusions.

The most general of these interpretations was the explanation of history as a whole and the English Revolution in particular, on essentially materialistic lines and with a clear consciousness of the class basis of political power. Here some seventeenth-century contemporaries give a very different impression of themselves and their motives from that which has been given to later generations by English historians. G. M. Trevelyan draws for us with inimitable literary skill a picture of our forefathers which makes us a little ashamed of our own base motives, and a little contemptuous of those which have actuated foreigners throughout history and made their revolutions sadly mundane affairs.

"That most rare of human events," he says, "a revolution that loftily enacts lofty ideals, can occur only in a state where wealth is well distributed, classes fairly balanced and kindly related, the common intellectual food wholesome, the imagination alive and the passion for morality widespread. . . . Yet for this once in history all causes for the unique event were found together. . . . Excepting the Reformation in Holland and in some continental cities, history perhaps records no revolution so noble as this, because no other nation in time of revolt was sound in its material and social fabric, yet alive to the appeals of intellect and quick to hear the restraining voice of conscience."

Then, passing on to a comparison of the French and English Revolutions, Professor Trevelyan comments with gentle disapproval on the way in which in the

former upheaval general principles (ideologies as we should call them to-day) were backed by material interests.

"But in England," he says with pride, "the revolutionary passions were stirred by no class in its own material interest. Our patriots were prosperous men, enamoured of liberty, or of religion, or of loyalty, each for her own sake, not as the handmaid of class greed." Later, he sums up: "For in motive it was a war, not of classes or of districts, but of ideas."¹

Very different were the conclusions of the contemporary James Harrington, English gentleman, traveller and political observer, who in his *Oceana* (published 1656) tried to analyse the reasons for strength and weakness in governments, and in particular to discover what was happening and why in revolutionary England. The key to the whole business seemed to him to be economic. In every age and every country economic power was the basis of political power. "Dominion," says Harrington, "is property real or personal—that is to say, in lands or in money and goods." If one man is sole landlord, then the political structure is that of absolute monarchy. If the ownership of land is distributed among a small class, then the political government is "mixed monarchy" (by which he means aristocracy or oligarchy). But "if the whole people be landlords, or hold the lands so divided among them that no one man or number of men within the compass of the few or aristocracy overbalance them, the empire (without

¹ G. M. Trevelyan, *England under the Stuarts*, Ninth Edition, pp. 195, 196, 229.

the interposition of force) is a Commonwealth."¹ Harrington's emphasis on land as the determinant of political power was natural in a seventeenth-century English gentleman who lived in what was still a predominantly agricultural country. But he himself notes that in highly commercialised cities trade takes the place of land, and another contemporary, Matthew Wren, goes further by insisting that even in existing English society the main economic and political force is money.²

In order that the government of a country shall be stable, says Harrington, it is necessary for the economic and political structures to correspond. When they do not, a tug-of-war takes place.

"For to make a Commonwealth unequal [with political and economic power not in correspondence] is to divide it into parties, which setteth them at perpetual variance, the one party endeavouring to preserve their eminence and inequality, and the other to attain unto equality; whence the people of Rome derived their perpetual strife with the nobility or Senate."³

Here, in addition to the materialist view of history, is an indication of the dialectical process.⁴

¹ J. Harrington, *Oceana*. Ed. S. B. Lilejgren, p. 15. In framing his theories, Harrington was probably influenced by the actual transference of economic power which he had seen taking place before his eyes, through the sale and, during the Revolution, the confiscation of the big feudal estates. It is possible that the Harrington family themselves were among the upper middle-class families who benefited by the break-up of the big estates. On this subject of land transference see S. J. Madge, *The Domesday of Crown Lands*, 1938. Also, C. Hill's article on *The Agrarian Legislation of the Interregnum*, in *Eng. Hist. Review*, April 1940.

² M. Wren, *Monarchy Asserted*, 1660.

³ Harrington, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴ It is interesting to trace a poetical parallel in the works of Andrew Marvell. His poem, *Appleton House*, which was conceived if not written during the revolutionary period, is planned on the lines of a main dialectical process with similar subordinate themes.

Applying his theory of history to the particular case of the English Revolution, Harrington was in little doubt as to the root cause of the clash between King and Parliament. Unlike Professor Trevelyan, he traced it not to conflicting "ideas," but to conflicting economic and political realities. When the ownership of land had really been confined to a small aristocratic circle, then an aristocratic government had been well enough. But Henry VII, by breaking up the great feudal estates with his Statutes of Population, Retainers and Alienation, started the rot; Henry VIII, by confiscating and distributing the monastic estates, carried it further; Elizabeth only staved off trouble by consummate good management; and under the early Stuarts breaking point was reached. Economic change clamoured to be made perfect in political change, and when the tension became unbearable revolution was bound to follow. "That the dissolution of the late Monarchy was as natural as the death of a man, hath been already shown."¹

Harrington himself was in intention a pure theorist—that is to say, he had no desire to try his hand at solving the political problems of the Commonwealth and Protectorate by applying his own medicine and making political institutions square more neatly with economic facts. Cromwell, a shrewd judge of when it was necessary to treat a political critic seriously, realised this when he remarked that "the gentleman had like to trepan him out of his power, but that what he got by the sword he would not quit for a little paper shot."²

¹ Harrington, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 49, 50, 54.

² Quoted by H. F. Russell Smith, *Harrington and his Oceana*, 1916, p. 75.

But Harrington had considerable influence on his contemporaries, and some of these were active politicians who saw no reason why what seemed to them a sound theory should not be applied to practical politics. Chief among these politicians were Mr. Neville and Captain Baynes, both of them Members of Parliament, who in the debates on the constitution in 1659 used Harrington's theories to justify the subordination of the House of Lords to the House of Commons, since economically, they said, "we are upon an equal balance, which puts out Turkish government and peerage." Captain Baynes emphasised the futility of any discussion on government which ignored its property basis.

"The first thing is," he said, "to see the materials. All government is built up on property, else the poor must rule it. . . . We must either lay the foundation in property, or else it will not stand. Property, generally, is now with the people; the government therefore must be there."¹

Harrington and his followers were, of course, mistaken in imagining that landed property was in possession of the rank and file of the people, or rather their definition of "people" was very narrow, confined as it was to the middle classes. But this limitation, natural enough in prosperous landowners and merchants, does not affect the general significance of their argument.

Harrington was a man of great intellect, equipped with all the advantages of a seventeenth-century

¹ H. Burton, *Diary*, Vol. III, especially pp. 133, 147, 148.

aristocrat's education. It is not surprising that his statement of the materialistic and class basis of history should be more polished than that of the Left-wing theorists of the English Revolution—the Diggers. Nevertheless, the root of the matter is to be found in them no less than in Harrington, and with the additional virtue that the narrow definition of “the people” is broadened to include, in the words of a contemporary, “the poorest he that is in England.” In the writings of Winstanley, the Digger leader, there is constant insistence on the necessity for the correlation of economic and political reform, though he, unlike the Harringtonians, wished to push economic reform further to make it square with the political pretension that England, by the execution of Charles I, had become a “free Commonwealth.” Winstanley's most important work, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*, was published in 1652, four years before Harrington's *Oceana*, and cannot therefore be regarded as in any way an imitative work. Indeed Harrington's modern biographer, H. F. Russell Smith, thinks that Harrington himself was probably considerably influenced by the theory and practice of the Digger movement.

Already in 1649 when Winstanley put the Diggers' case before the Lord General and the Council of War, he declared: “We know that England cannot be a free Commonwealth unless all the poor commoners have a free use and benefit of the land. . . . Neither can the kingly power be removed so long as this kingly power in the hands of Lords of Manors rules over us.”¹ Again, in 1652 he prefaced his description of the ideal

¹ “To my Lord General and the Council of War,” *Clarke Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 219–20.

state (*The Law of Freedom*) by an appeal to Cromwell to see that "the Oppressor's power be cast out with his person" and the land distributed to the common people. If this reform were not carried out, then "you must only remove the Conqueror's power out of the King's hand into other men's . . . and you will either lose yourself or lay the foundation of greater slavery to posterity than ever you knew." By the end of the Commonwealth period Winstanley was not alone in seeing a dark vision of a time when what was as yet partial enslavement should have been completed. The author of a *Modest Plea for an Equal Commonwealth*, writing in 1659, asked if the distribution of wealth was not as unequal as ever, and if the sum total of the English people's effort to rid England of a tyrant had not been simply to increase the number of their masters, "who when they have engrossed the lands and wealth of the whole nation, there will remain nothing for either them to purchase or us to sell but ourselves to be their slaves, and to restore vassalage, that hath been so long abrogated."¹ Here is anticipated what a modern writer has called "the long agony of depressing the yeoman and small handicraftsman to wage-labourer."² The English Revolution, with its breakdown of antiquated forms of royal and aristocratic economic privilege in favour of a vigorous and competent middle class, was a necessary stage in the transition of the country from feudalism to modern economy. Its immediate benefits were, however, limited to the class who had been its motive power.

¹ Sprigge, *Modest Plea for an Equal Commonwealth*, 1659.

² C. E. Gore, "250th Anniversary of the 'Glorious' Revolution of 1688," *Communist International*, Vol. XVI.

Small producers in town and country were squeezed out by larger and more efficient forms of production and went to swell that nucleus of a proletariat which already existed. Hopes which had been raised by the Revolution were bitterly disappointed, as the "freedom" which had been so widely promised in revolutionary manifestos was found to mean freedom for a class and not for the people as a whole.

One of the most widespread social movements during the Revolutionary period was the agitation for reform of the law. It was an agitation by no means confined to the left revolutionaries, for the progressive middle class (when they did not happen to have a vested interest as lawyers) were anxious to sweep away some of the old anomalies. But whenever law reform was advocated by writers with left-wing tendencies much emphasis was laid on the class basis of existing laws and the absurdity of expecting to pluck democratic grapes from aristocratic thistles. Since the laws of England had up to date been made by a single class of wealthy landowners, it was obvious, said the left-wing reformers, that the laws represented the interests of this class and had little regard for the general good. The Norman Conquest was represented as the great watershed of English history, when alien invaders with William at their head ousted the old English landowners and framed all laws and institutions with the object of maintaining themselves in power. To the left-wing revolutionaries the Norman Conquest and its iniquities represented a theme of major importance, and it is interesting to speculate how far it was a theme artificially worked up for propaganda purposes and how far

it represented lingering native resentment against the conquerors.¹

Here again Winstanley was one of those who interpreted the question in terms of class interest. The laws, he says, are rightly called the King's laws "because the King's own creatures made the laws; lords of manors, freeholders, etc., were successors of the Norman soldiers from the Conquest; therefore they could do no other but maintain their own and the King's interest. Do we not see that all laws were made in the days of the King to ease the rich landlord? The poor labourers were left under bondage still; they were to have no freedom in the earth by those pharisaical laws."² To Lord Fairfax and the Council of War Winstanley pointed out that English law as it stood gave true freedom only to the gentry and clergy, and that if the only "freedom" of the common people consisted in the right to work for wages, then they might as well live in Turkey (the seventeenth-century example of an autocratic régime) where a similar "freedom" was enjoyed.³

Two pamphlets on the specific subject of law reform work out this thesis of the domination of the legal system by economic and political interests with greater elaboration. *The Corruption and Deficiency of the Laws of England Soberly Discovered* was printed in 1649 for a certain John Warr by a well-known left-wing printer,

¹ Cf. G. K. Chesterton's poem, *The Secret People* (i.e. the common people):

"The fine French Kings came over in a flutter of flags and dames.
We liked their smiles and battles, but we never could say their names."

It is a fact, the significance of which needs further investigation, that the names of the Army Agitators have a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon ring, e.g. Starre, Goodgroome, Hoggrill, Sawyer.

² Winstanley, *Law of Freedom*.

³ Winstanley, *A Letter to Lord Fairfax and the Council of War*, 1649.

Giles Calvert. This writer contends that the only laws which show any regard for the popular good are those which have been wrested by the people from their rulers by main force. "For," says he, "the great men of the world, being invested with the power thereof, cannot be imagined to eclipse themselves or their own pomp unless by the violent interposition of the people's spirits, who are most sensible of their own burdens and most forward in seeking relief." Even when the people have forced good laws from their rulers, these are turned and twisted to suit the rulers' convenience and interest. English laws have been manipulated at every successive conquest, and that part of the old law retained which has served the purpose of the dominant class. What is needed is a thorough reformation and an expulsion of corrupt interests. "The more general a good is," says John Warr, "the more divine and god-like. . . . Communities are rather to be respected than the private interests of men."¹

The most remarkable exposure of the class basis of English law was made in 1659 by William Cole in *A Rod for the Lawyers*. It is an accepted commonplace, he says, that all laws ought to be for the benefit and interest of the people governed. And, indeed, that is the classic view of the laws of England put forward by lawyers on the one hand and ignorant people on the other. So perfect are the English laws reputed that anyone who suggests altering them is attacked as mischievous. "But to those is answered, that the major part of the laws made in this nation are founded on principles of tyranny, fallacy and oppression, for the

¹ J. Warr, *The Corruption and Deficiency of the Laws of England Soberly Discovered*, 1649.

profit and benefit of those that made them." Then follows an unusually vigorous and clear statement of the Norman Conquest theory of the roots of oppression.

"For know this, that when William the Bastard Duke of Normandy undertook to conquer this nation he was not singly himself able to raise money or men enough to perform such a design, without the voluntary conjunction of most of the nobles and gentry that were his subjects, who sold and mortgaged almost all the lands and estates they had in Normandy to furnish them out in that design: Now therefore when the said William had conquered this nation he was forced to suffer those his Norman Peers to share with him in the benefit as they did in the hazard."

So it happened that the Conqueror and his nobles expropriated the old landowners, divided up the land among themselves and kept their English tenants in complete subjection. Then arose the need for a legal system to bolster up this economic and social domination, and so "did these Conquerors make such laws as suited best to keep the people in slavery and subjection, as the English now use the Irish [a very significant comparison] that they might have all the benefit they possibly could screw out of the people." From that time forward the laws have been made by the King, Lords, and a Lower House consisting of gentry and lawyers. Naturally the laws they made have redounded to their own benefit, and are calculated to keep in subjection not only their own tenants but all neighbouring poor.¹

¹ W. Cole, *A Rod for the Lawyers*, 1659.

In their interpretation of history and the legal system many writers of the Revolutionary period anticipated the Marxian viewpoint. But the writer in whose works appear the most numerous anticipations of Marxism is Winstanley, and this fact is a natural consequence of the aims and constitution of the Digger movement, of which he was the leader. In contrast with the Leveller movement, which voiced the claims of the small private property owners—peasant proprietors and independent craftsmen—the Diggers spoke for the propertyless labourers, especially those of the countryside. Neither town nor country proletariat was an important class in seventeenth-century England, and this was one of the main reasons why the Digger campaign attained little practical success. In the eyes of Winstanley and his followers the small elements grew to large proportions, and by means of a sort of magnifying-glass process they were able to foresee, though dimly, problems and their solutions which were not to become acute till nearly two centuries later. Yet Winstanley was far from being in advance of his time in all respects. The general atmosphere of mid-seventeenth-century English thought was religious, though with the gradual emergence of a more secular outlook, as exemplified in the writings of some of the Levellers. Winstanley was in this matter a typical and even backward-looking product of his time. His religious beliefs were unorthodox, the counterpart of his revolutionary social and economic programme, but they were none the less intense, and sometimes led him to unrealistic conclusions, as when he claimed that the power of love would conquer all opposition. If, as has been said, the writings of Lilburne, the Leveller

leader, are like the conversation of a man talking all night in a tavern, those of Winstanley sometimes read like the excursions into practical politics of a religious mystic. His writings have been stigmatised by the well-known Conservative historian, Professor Feiling, as "half-baked," and it is true enough that Winstanley is not in the running with Professor Feiling for the *cordon bleu*. Nevertheless, the raw ingredients which he assembled have merits which go far to compensate for any lack of virtuosity with which they are presented.

The scheme for communistic government drawn up in the *Law of Freedom* is full of significant diagnoses and suggestions. Winstanley's whole preoccupation with the economic and social basis of his Utopia is itself significant. Whereas Harrington was remarkable for putting economics on an equality with politics, Winstanley put them in the forefront. Parliament is mentioned, but as a high law court rather than a governmental body, and clearly the people who matter in his Utopia are those who have charge of its economic and social arrangements. Every member of the community has to work, both for the good of his individual soul and because the universal obligation to labour is essential for the upkeep of the commonwealth. The planting and reaping of the earth are to be managed by a system of mutual co-operation, and harvests are to be deposited in storehouses from which individuals can fetch materials for their work or their own private use. In this state where "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" was to be the rule, Winstanley foresaw a tremendous release of creative ability, due to the slackening of economic pressure. "And certainly," he says, "when men are

sure of food and raiment, their reasons will be ripe and ready to dive into the secrets of the Creation. For fear of want and care to pay rent to taskmasters hath hindered many rare inventions." Not only this, but many frustrations and miseries which have been regarded as purely personal will disappear when economic oppression is removed. "I am assured," says Winstanley, "that if it be rightly searched into, the inward bondages of the mind, as covetousness, pride, hypocrisy, envy, sorrow, fear, desperation and madness, are all occasioned by the outward bondage that one sort of people lay upon another."¹

The existence of private property, according to Winstanley, is the key to all selfish interest and conflicts within the state. Its effects, however, do not end there, for they are the main cause of the fear and the dissatisfied ambitions which give rise to inter-state conflicts. *The True Levellers' Standard Advanced* (published 1649) explained the surprising bent of mankind towards mutual destruction by the desire "to uphold civil property, and honour, dominion and riches over one another." In the *Law of Freedom* the same theme is developed. "Indeed," says Winstanley, "the government of kings is a breeder of wars because men being put into the straits of poverty are moved to fight for liberty and to take one another's estates from them and to obtain mastery. Look into all armies and see what they do more but make some poor, some rich, put some into freedom, others into bondage; and is not this a plague among mankind?"

But it would not do for the people, the ordinary peasant and the common soldier, to see too clearly

¹ *Law of Freedom.*

that they were being used both in peace and war for the benefit of their masters. Unorthodox in his own religious convictions, Winstanley saw clearly enough that organised religion could be used as opium for the common people. In *A New Year's Gift to Parliament and the Army* (published 1650) he described how the poor man was being forced to work for starvation wages, but if he dared complain of his lot, "presently the tithing priest stops his mouth with a slam and tells him that is meant of the inward satisfaction of mind which the poor shall have, though they enjoy nothing at all." In the *Law of Freedom* the divorce between thought and action which characterises the clergy is castigated, along with their method of injecting opium:

"This Divinity is always speaking words to deceive the simple that he may make them work for him and maintain him, but he never comes to action himself to do as he would be done by; for he is a monster who is all tongue and no hand. . . . This is the filthy dreamer and the cloud without rain. And indeed the subtle clergy do know that if they can but charm the people by this their divining doctrine to look after riches, Heaven and Glory when they are dead, that they shall easily be the inheritors of the earth, and have the deceived people to be their servants."

Perhaps the most penetrating description of the use of religion as opium in warfare came from the Parliamentary lawyer, John Selden, who wrote under the heading of "Religion" in his *Table Talk*:

"The very Arcanum of pretending religion in all wars is that something may be found out in which all men may have interest. In this the groom has as

much interest as the lord. Were it for land, one has one thousand acres and the other but one; he would not venture so far as he that has a thousand. But religion is equal to both. Had all men land alike, by a *Lex Agraria*, then all men would say they fought for land."¹

Discoursing on the same theme to Lord Fairfax and the Council of War, Winstanley pointed out that if land were equally distributed, then the country would be so united in "love and strength" that if it were attacked by force Englishmen would rise as one man to defend it.²

It was Winstanley who anticipated the central point of Marxian economic doctrine, the labour theory of value. In his *New Year's Gift to Parliament and the Army* he was feeling his way towards it by asking the lords of manors what they would do without such labouring men as the Diggers to work for them. By 1652 in his *Law of Freedom* he had developed this simple question into a theory:

"No man," he says, "can be rich but he must be rich either by his own labours or by the labours of other men helping him. If a man have no help from his neighbours he shall never gather an estate of hundreds and thousands a year. If other men help him to work then are those riches his neighbours' as well as his own. But all rich men live at ease, feeding and clothing themselves by the labours of other men, not by their own, which is their shame and not their nobility; for it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive. But rich men receive all they have from the

¹ J. Selden, *Table Talk*.

² "To my Lord General, etc.," *Clarke Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 219-20.

labourer's hand, and when they give they give away other men's labours, not their own."

The Revolutionary situation of the mid-seventeenth century produced the phenomenon of Marxist anticipation in men of varying classes and creeds; but it was, as we have seen, among the left-wing revolutionaries that the anticipations were most numerous and far-reaching. The writings of these men were not mere literary curiosities, nor, despite their allegedly half-baked form, deprecated by Professor Feiling, were they the ravings of half-wits. Products of the left and unsuccessful wing of the Revolution, they ran ahead of the main currents of their time and made little or no positive impression on the course of contemporary history. Negatively, indeed, they were more successful, for they helped to fill the middle-class revolutionaries with a lively fear of real democracy which betrayed itself in the repressive legislation of the Commonwealth and Restoration period. But the value of a theory cannot be judged by whether or no it is immediately translated into practice. Winstanley's views, transmitted through John Beller's *College of Industry* (published 1696), were to impress Robert Owen so forcibly that he remarked "that any merit due for the discovery calculated to effect more substantial and permanent benefit to mankind than any ever yet contemplated by the human mind belongs exclusively to John Bellers."¹ If there the stream of continuity appears to have become submerged, that is no reason why it should not be uncovered by those who are interested in the native British tradition of left-wing socialism.

¹ R. Owen, *A New View of Society*.

III

MILTON: THE REVOLUTIONARY INTELLECTUAL

MILTON'S work spans the crucial years of the English Revolution. He grew up in an awareness of imminent change, of the opening of a new era of divine solicitude for mankind, and he early dedicated all his talent to the furtherance of the providential plan. It was his intention to fit himself for a supreme creative effort by many years of intellectual and moral preparation, so that with a poem as lofty in conception as it would be exquisite in craftsmanship, he might do his part in leading the nation to "the love and practice of justice, temperance and fortitude." But to fill these abstract terms with meaning, in the light of a purified religion, necessitated a revaluation of all the values sanctified by those twin superstitions, custom and "authority."¹ Such a social, political and legal, cultural and ethical "reformation," would proceed, it seemed to Milton, from the reformation of the Church and establish the basis of a new social order. If, in fact, other changes preceded that in the Church, material changes demanding the overthrow of the mediæval structure of ideas and a new attitude to society, to Nature and to God, that was hidden from the actors in these great events. We shall not understand Milton

¹ Scholastic authority, that is, based on the writings of the Fathers, not on the direct word of God as set down in Scripture.

unless we remember that he thought of himself as no mere versifier, but as a conscious participant in this vital process, to which his contribution was not an ornamental but a formative one, in the same sense as was that of Bacon or of Newton.

We may date from Macaulay's essay of 1825 Milton's canonisation as the laureate of the victorious middle class, but his ideal values have become platitudes of the pulpit, the speech-day and the election campaign, at the price of slurring over the fact that he narrowly escaped the halter and the disembowelling knife because he endeavoured to embody his ideas of liberty, to have them realised as tangible relations in an actual human society.

That Milton had great intellect, moral character and poetic gifts is by now a commonplace of criticism. There is a degree of consciousness of purpose in his life which is equalled by that of no other English poet, to which Dante's, perhaps, provides the only modern parallel. Milton's genius was precocious. The accident that his early writings are mainly in Latin, the international language then, has to some extent obscured a general understanding of the coherence of his development, but that obstacle has been removed by recent scholarship.¹ It still remains to be more widely realised that if Milton's glowing tributes to the achievements of liberty symbolised by Republican Greece and Rome evidently rise from some profound emotion, it was because he had in his own early life ample experience of the tyrannic State; and he found it no less sordid and degrading because it wore the comely features of the Stuart victim or was draped in the spotless surplice

¹ See items 1 and 3 in Book List.

which Archbishop Laud regarded as essential to the "beauty of holiness."

Accepting as given the genius and temperament of Milton, his environment provided the heat of conflict which incubated their latent tendencies and hatched the full-fledged epic poet with his mighty lift of wing. His social position and experience were such as to develop his capabilities in the same direction as the historic movement of his time. Had he been born in an aristocratic station, he might have vacillated, for all his philosophy, at the moment of crisis, of armed conflict, like the sincere Falkland; in an economically dependent status he could never have acquired the universal culture which alone could nourish the epic flight.

For such a boy, born and bred in the heart of London, the son of a successful money-lender, there could be no escaping the impact either of the ardours or of the anxieties of those years during which the solution of the primary political issue was approaching maturity. In 1620 he was aged twelve. Had he been born twenty years earlier, he would have missed the stimulus of offensive political action; twenty years later, and he would have found the progressive elements dispersed and in confusion; but during the first twenty years of the poet's life his home was the centre of successful material activity, his father was sympathetic to his son's high purpose, and there was the spirit abroad of a growing unity, militant and optimistic.

All these factors together differentiated him sharply from the poets and intellectuals dependent on the Court, the established Church or the cultured aristocracy. He was a member, and a very conscious one, of a community which was slowly formulating a view of

its great future in terms of the general destiny of enlightened Protestantism. Now is expressed the growing sense of a congregation of the Elect, set over against and cutting itself off from the corrupt and rotten growth of the past; an international community ("the sunny reflection of all the neighbouring churches") in stern array against the dusky powers of evil—the spiritual oppression of the Papacy and its temporal claims championed by the armed might of Spain. Thus the religious impulse linked up with the patriotism which first grew aware of itself through that God-driven storm, when for us English, "the Northern Ocean even to the frozen Thule was scattered with the proud shipwrecks of the Spanish Armada, and the very maw of Hell ransacked, and made to give up her concealed destruction, ere she could vent it in that horrible and damned blast."¹ Yet Milton's intense patriotism was not exclusive, and he was an ardent and consistent internationalist. For him, regenerated England was to lead, first among equals, a regenerated Europe.

Milton's father was a prominent member of a profession which was drawing more and more of the financial business of the country into its hands. The scriveners were well-to-do, though not wealthy on the scale of the big landowners, of course, or of the great merchants, but they controlled very much more than they possessed. A modern authority thinks that we should regard the scriveners rather than the goldsmiths as the originators of banking. Their primary function was the drawing-up of legal documents, bonds, leases, transfers of land, etc., so that they came into intimate relations with the landed gentry, one section of which was

¹ Of Reformation touching Church-discipline in England.

succumbing to, whilst another was taking advantage of, the new conditions. It would be quite natural, then, that a scrivener should accommodate a client who was temporarily short of ready money, for a consideration of so much per cent., of course, now that the restrictions on usury, never very effective, had fallen into desuetude. But since his own available free capital would not be enough to supply all the impecunious or enterprising gentry with whom his business brought him in contact, it was a natural step to accept or solicit deposits from those who had idle money in order to invest it on their behalf. We have evidence of one such transaction by Milton's father which became the subject of a law suit, pointing to the early existence of sharp practice in the profession, though not in fact besmirching his personal reputation for integrity. The action concerned a sum of £3,600 on which the depositor had been paid 8 per cent. for many years.

The indispensable condition for the success of such a business was obviously for the capital to be ceaselessly active, for ever renewing itself. Hence a tendency to lend to the progressive type, the producer as against the mere consumer. Or, if a loan were made to an old-fashioned gentleman living above his rent-roll, it would be on the security of his estate, and it would be only a question of time before the mortgage was foreclosed and that much land brought into the sector of capitalist exploitation. The backward gentlemen naturally raised an outcry at the machinations of these upstarts, and the dramatists were frequently their mouthpieces, mocking the fat merchants who aspired to become landed proprietors. That the scriveners also were recognised as an enemy is proved by a poem "On the occasion of His

Majesty's proclamation in 1630 commanding the gentry to live upon their estates in the country"¹—in which the advantages of a country life are listed, among them the fact that there the improvident squires will be "free from the griping scrivener's bonds."

But the survival of feudal tenures in land must have hampered considerably the scriveners' transactions, whilst they, like the merchants, would have suffered from the arbitrary methods of taxation resorted to by the Stuarts. Hence as a body the scriveners (they were incorporated in 1628) would have tended to support the party that stood for reform in Church and State, though, of course, the allegiance of individual members of the profession to King or Parliament was not so simply determined.²

But although every scrivener was not a champion of militant Protestantism, Milton grew up in a circle where this attitude was predominant, for his father had been turned away from the paternal home because his strong feeling for the reformed religion conflicted with his own father's bold adherence through the Elizabethan persecution to the Church of Rome. His first tutor, Andrew Young (with whom he was later associated in the pamphlet war against the bishops), was a keen Presbyterian who could find no living in an England under High Church domination.

¹ By Sir Richard Fanshawe.

² One of them, for instance, made his fortune by assisting the Royalist and recusant group of the aristocracy, who were soaked by the Parliament's system of fines. The scale of his transactions is impressive. His income from fees was from 1639-40 at the rate of £1,000 a year. At one time he had £17,000 out at interest, lent to about 100 clients, who included sixteen peers, a bishop and some forty baronets and knights. See "Humphrey Shalcrosse and the Great Civil War," by Max Beloff, *English Historical Review*, October, 1939. Incidentally, Milton's younger brother grew up a Royalist.

At St. Paul's School, Milton made two friendships which had an important influence on his development. One was with Alexander Gill, son of the headmaster of the same name, who acted as usher. He was an anarchically rebellious creature who composed virulent Latin poems against the Papists and the Court faction. Milton later speaks of having greatly valued his conversation, and, judging by Gill's subsequent trouble with the authorities, which nearly cost him his ears, it may well have been he who roused Milton's interest in the Parliamentary struggle then taking shape in the opposition to the Duke of Buckingham with its inherent challenge to the royal prerogative.

A friendship of a different order was that with Charles Diodati, a pupil at the same school, whose early death deprived Milton of a comrade for whom he had an absorbing affection such as no other human being evoked in his life.

The Diodatis were a family of Protestant refugees. They had fled first from Italy to France, and when persecution began there after the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, to Geneva. Charles's grandfather was a merchant-banker, his father practised as a physician in London, and he was to enter the same profession. Here was in palpable shape a concise lesson in the stifling character of the tentacular papal power, its persecution of true religion, and its obscurantism, frustrating the pious and active engendering of wealth and hindering the spread of progressive knowledge. With what forebodings they must have regarded the policy of the English government, which, so far from extirpating the remnants of the Romish superstitions, drove the genuine Protestants underground or

overseas, and promoted the sycophantic adulators of a servile dependency! So, by the time he left for Cambridge, exceptionally well-equipped as to classical scholarship, Milton was confirmed in the consciousness of an impending decisive struggle, in which the claims of religion, of politics and of business were inextricably intertwined.¹

MILTON AND THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

The Universities, closely linked with Church and Crown, were the main instrument by which the old order maintained its domination over ideas. In spite of a purge of Royalist heads of colleges and fellows, the Commonwealth never succeeded in establishing the influence in these centres necessary to make them really responsive to the new social needs, so that after the Restoration they reassumed the function of a feudalistic drag-brake which, with slight reservations, they have exercised ever since. It is significant that Milton, who was almost alone among outstanding intellectuals as a consistent champion of the Parliament, was first of all a rather lonely opponent of the prevailing university system.

Although Cambridge had been penetrated to a considerable extent by Puritan theology and practices, the educational method remained what it had been when Mediæval culture was at its height, and was totally oblivious of the recent acquisitions of knowledge.

¹ The reader will find the point-of-view of patriotic Protestantism best put in the poem on the Gunpowder Plot, *In Quintum Novembris*; a distinctly new religious note, optimistic and militant, is sounded in the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*; and the heaven-blest merit of chastity which is so exquisitely celebrated in *Comus* is not unconnected with the Puritan-capitalist reaction against irresponsible consumption.

Aristotle and the philosophers of the Middle Ages were regarded simply as a store-house of syllogisms, and the sole method of mental training was the establishment of the correctness of a proposition by the rules of formal logic. Neither history nor mathematics, let alone any experimental science, was included in the curriculum. Material reality was a sealed and prohibited book. Fantasies were corroborated by fantasies, till words took on a life of their own, and like cancerous cells broke down the healthy inter-communication between sensuous experience and mental activity. It was truly a dream-world, yet for all its insubstantiality it stood as a formidable barrier in the path of that social advance for which an understanding of natural phenomena was imperative.

Somewhen or other, the eager schoolboy at St. Paul's had got hold of the philosophical works of Francis Bacon, and there he had found expounded with sublime clarity the principles by which this understanding of reality could be actually achieved. Yet Milton's delight at making contact with this revolutionising doctrine threw into sharper contrast the fate immediately ahead of him—subjection for several years to come to the tread-mill of fruitless logic-chopping. He would have read with grim foreboding Bacon's caustic appraisal (in *The Advancement of Learning*) of the scholasticism which was the official philosophy of his future *alma mater*:

“This kind of degenerate learning did chiefly reign among the schoolmen; who having sharp and strong wits, and abundance of leisure, and small variety of reading; but their wits being shut up in the cells of a few authors (chiefly Aristotle their dictator) as their

persons were shut up in the cells of monasteries and colleges; and knowing little history, either of nature or time; did out of no great quantity of matter; and infinite agitation of wit, spin out unto us those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books."

It is only on the assumption that he went up to Cambridge with strongly pronounced ideas as to what and how he should be taught that we can account for the friction that developed almost immediately between him and those responsible for his studies.

Nor is it improbable that, with his admiration for the great philosopher so recently dead, he should have taken an early opportunity to examine the copy of the *De Argumentis Scientiarum* which Bacon had presented to his old University with a dedication which attempted, as far as was consistent with courtesy, to prod the dusty custodians of learning out of their age-long slumber. And one sentence of that dedication Milton would have pondered deeply, for it lies at the root of the ideas which he was shortly to elaborate as a protagonist of the new theory of knowledge:

"Surely the grace of the divine light will attend and shine upon you, if humbling and submitting Philosophy to Religion you make a *legitimate and dexterous use of the keys of the senses*; and putting away all zeal of contradiction, each dispute with other as if he were disputing with himself."

The method of testing the qualifications of students then in use was by means of a public debate, in Latin, of course, in which one candidate would defend and

another attack a given proposition according to the rules of the prescribed system of logic. Milton preserved the transcripts of his contributions to some of these debates, although they were not given to the printer till the year of his death, in 1674, under the title *Prolusiones Oratoriæ*. Some of these seven pieces are of much more than ephemeral interest, and of the most mature of them, on the theme "that Learning brings more Happiness to men than Ignorance," Masson says:

"it is one of the finest pieces of Latin prose ever penned by an Englishman. The Latin differs from Bacon's Latin precisely as Milton himself differed from Bacon. It is eloquent after a different fashion, a magnanimous chant rather than a splendid dissertation."

And not only was Milton a modernist as to style; he ardently embraced the progressive world outlook as against the cosmogony of dying feudalism, which had fitted itself with an appropriate theory to the effect that Nature was passing into its senile period. The best-known poetic expression of this reflection of social decay is Donne's *Anniversaries*. Milton boldly asserted the contrary in a Latin poem annexed to one of these debates, *Naturam non pati senium*, that Nature is not subject to decay (or "not impaired by time" as Mr. W. Skeat renders it). Milton came very close to the position of scientific materialism, as was, of course, strategically essential for the ideologist of an advancing class.

The third and seventh Prolusions are in fact poetic elaborations on the true end of knowledge, "the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible"—which was the precise

opposite of such aims as the University was conscious of. It tells us much of Milton's character, his militancy, his inborn need to speak his mind freely against all opposition, that though only a youth he should calmly face the black-gowned rows of prejudice and convention and launch a frontal attack on all that they unthinkingly revered and by which they held their privileged positions. We know that he did indeed encounter much hostility in his early years at Cambridge, till in time his intellectual and personal qualities won him a number of friends. It would have been strange indeed if many of his audience had not borne him a grudge when he publicly exposed their pretensions, based on their dexterity in logic and rhetoric, with a mastery of logic and rhetoric that they could not emulate.

Here is a relevant passage from his oration "Against the Scholastic Philosophy," delivered in the Public Schools—that is, not merely before his own college, but the whole University. After a description of the wearisome drudgery to which the enforced routine condemns the student, he goes on to denounce its results:

"Besides all this, it not infrequently happens that those who have entirely devoted and dedicated themselves to this blight of disputation lamentably display their ignorance and absurd childishness when faced with a new situation outside their usual idiotic occupation. Finally, the supreme result of all this earnest labour is to make you a more finished fool and cleverer contriver of conceits, and to endow you with a more expert ignorance: and no wonder, since all these problems at which you have been working

in such torment and anxiety have no existence in reality at all, but like unreal ghosts and phantoms without substance obsess minds already disordered and empty of all true wisdom."

He does not confine himself to this destructive criticism, but follows it with an avowal of his own adherence to the new learning, expressed in a glowing celebration of the potentialities of real knowledge systematically pursued, in which, under the poetic figures, can be recognised the sciences we should classify as geography, political history, astronomy, etc.:

"But how much better were it, gentlemen, and how much more consonant with your dignity, now to let your eyes wander as it were over all the lands depicted on the map, and to behold the places trodden by the heroes of old, to range over the regions made famous by wars, by triumphs, and even by the tales of poets of renown . . . then to spy out the customs of mankind and those states which are well ordered; next to seek out and explore the nature of all living creatures, and after that to turn your attention to the secret virtues of stones and herbs. And do not shrink from taking your flight into the skies and gazing upon the manifold shapes of the clouds, the mighty piles of snow, and the source of the dews of morning; then inspect the coffers wherein the hail is stored and examine the arsenals of the thunderbolts. And do not let the intent of Jupiter or of Nature elude you, when a huge and fearful comet threatens to set the heavens aflame, nor let the smallest star escape you of all the myriads which are scattered and strewn between the poles; yes, even follow close upon the sun in all his journeys, and ask
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account of time itself and demand the reckoning of its eternal passage."

If Milton's enthusiastic vision could nerve him to ignore the sour looks of his seniors, the sneers of his more frivolous contemporaries, it was because he saw before him a universe which was man's to master, and through that mastery to bring Fate and Chance, man's oldest enemies, under his hand. In the prophetic way that poets have, he overleapt more than two centuries of experience and boldly proclaimed that man can be free, that "universal learning" will equip him with the power to "recognise necessity." There was more talk in Cambridge that year of Laud's attempts to bring to heel the dons who would eat meat on fast-days and have the Communion table in the centre of the college chapel (instead of in the chancel), than of young Milton who had made his last oration there, and was returning to his home intent on scaling the highest peaks of intellectual attainment:

"So at length, gentlemen, when universal learning has once completed its cycle, the spirit of man, no longer confined within this dark prison-house, will reach out far and wide, till it fills the whole world and the space far beyond with the expansion of its divine greatness. Then at last most of the chances and changes of the world will be so quickly perceived that to him who holds this stronghold of wisdom hardly anything can happen in his life which is unforeseen or fortuitous. He will indeed seem to be one whose rule and dominion the stars obey, to whose command earth and sea hearken, and whom winds and tempests serve; to whom, lastly, Mother Nature herself has surrendered, as if indeed some god had

abdicated the throne of the world and entrusted its rights, laws, and administration to him as governor."¹

THE PAMPHLETEER FOR LIBERTY

If ever a poet might have claimed to be excused from sharing in the political turmoil in order to devote himself to his art, that poet was Milton. In the poems written since he had left Cambridge—*L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus, Lycidas*—he had established a new excellence in English verse, but he knew himself not yet fit for the work that should level Christian English poesy with the supreme achievements of pagan Greece and Rome. By the eve of the Civil War, he had advanced far in his preparatory plan, which was no less than to assimilate the whole of extant culture in its historical development, and he was casting about for the proper form and subject the poem should take—hesitating between the epic and the dramatic, between a fable drawn from history and one from Scripture. Yet for nearly twenty years, from his thirty-third to his fiftieth year, Milton voluntarily devoted himself to quite different tasks. How is this to be accounted for?

The first measures of the Long Parliament, meeting in November, 1640, had deeply undermined the structure of arbitrary power which had been set up or strengthened by Charles, Strafford and Laud. Men felt that a mass of evil had been swept away and that the anomalies that remained would soon follow the prerogative courts and arbitrary taxation into oblivion. Charles himself had not yet been exposed in his

¹ For the translations and much information in this section I am indebted to P. B. and E. M. W. Tillyard's excellent version of Milton's *Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises*. E. R.

obduracy and deceit as the implacable enemy. This mood is clearly reflected in a ballad which sums up the first year's work of the Parliament. It is dated early in 1642 and is one of the few surviving ballads in which the popular point of view finds expression:

*"Like silly sheep they did us daily shear,
Like asses strong, our backs were made to bear
Intolerable burdens, year by year,
No hope, no help, no comfort did appear,
But from the great Council of the King,
And the King's great Council.*

*"With taxes, and monopolies opprest,
Ship-money, soldiers, knighthood, and the rest,
The coat-and-conduct money was no jest,
Then think, good neighbour, how much we are blest
In the great Council of the King,
And the King's great Council. . . .*

*"Who did regard our poverty, our tears,
Our wants, our miseries, our many fears,
Whipt, stript, and fairly banisht as appears;
You that are masters, now, of your own ears
Bless the great Council of the King,
And the King's great Council. . . ."*¹

And Milton shared, during the first sweeping drive of the long-deferred Parliament's progressive legislation, this widespread mood of confidence: "I calmly awaited the issue of the contest, which I trusted to the wise conduct of Providence, and to the courage of the people."²

¹ H. E. Rollins, *Cavalier and Puritan*.

² *Second Defence of the English People*.

But the ease with which these important gains were acquired was deceptive, for Charles was determined to revoke them, as he had done with earlier "concessions," once the mass pressure was relaxed. The question as to whether King or Parliament was to wield the State power had to be finally decided, as the more far-sighted on each side realised, by force. But the Parliament's next move was to bring in a Bill to abolish episcopacy. That the choice of this issue was tactically correct was shown by the frantic endeavours of the Court party to save the temporal powers of the bishops. This conflict provided the field in which each party carried out a preliminary mobilisation of its forces, and Parliament had the advantage in the fact that popular feeling, particularly in London and the Eastern Counties, was concentrated against the institution whose overweening interference with their daily lives the people had long resented. The Church was one of the largest and most backward landowners, and the bishops' disciplinary power in their dioceses and the part taken by the clergy generally in local administration were important factors in retarding economic progress and the ideological revolution, Puritanism, which was stimulating it. And politically the Crown, by its right of hand-picking the bishops, was assured of a solid block of votes in the House of Lords.

For months the struggle raged, with petitions and counter-petitions from the country at large, with impassioned demonstrations of London citizens to the Houses of Parliament. With the abolition of the episcopal censorship of the Press, the advocates of a new system of Church government could put forward their views without danger to their ears or nostrils, and

the guerrilla pamphlet war developed into large-scale activity. Whether Milton demonstrated or not we do not know, but he certainly supported the petition presented by the solid and respectable citizens of the quarter, Aldersgate Street, in the City, where he was living.

It was whilst the issue thus hung in the balance that Milton took the moral decision which had such far-reaching effects throughout his life. In one of the few subjective passages in his pamphlets (for these tell us much about his thoughts and ambitions, but little of his feelings), he reveals that this was the moment when he had been brought to face the possibility that the Revolution might not conquer at this juncture. That, however confident, as a Christian, he must be in that final victory, trust in Providence was not to be confused with fatalism; but that, under God's grace, the outcome depended on "the industry and courage of faithful men." So, he goes on, should the Church be brought under heavy oppression, and he had taken no part in its defence, "I foresee what stories I should hear within myself, all my life after, of discourage and reproach:

"Timorous and ungrateful, the Church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies: and thou bewailest, what matters it for thee or thy bewailing? when time was, thou couldst not find a syllable of all that thou hadst read, or studied, to utter in her behalf. Yet ease and leisure was given thee for thy retired thoughts out of the sweat of other men. Thou hadst the diligence, the parts, the language of a man, if a vain subject were to be adorned or beautified, but when the cause of God and his Church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that

tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listened if he could hear thy voice among his zealous servants, but thou wert dumb as a beast; from henceforward be that which thine own brutish silence hath made thee."¹

So Milton accepted the obligation of actively participating in the social conflict and joined the small body of pamphleteers who were assailing the main position of episcopacy, its claim to be divinely ordained. For if bishops had not been instituted by the command of God, as revealed in Scripture, then it remained for men to search those Scriptures and with the aid of reason to restore that method of Church government which God had originally intended, but which the ambition and greed of men had perverted.

In something under two years Milton contributed five pamphlets to the controversy. Although he had to make use of the technique of argument then in fashion, the citing of texts and marshalling of authorities, he brings to the work all his specific gifts of eloquence, whether of high lyricism or scarifying vituperation, and reasoning power; and since all his arguments are inspired by principles which concern us in other forms to-day, his pamphlets maintain their interest when most of those by his associates have become merely antiquarian curiosities. It was especially the secular pretensions of the prelates which he assailed, from many different angles: their ostentation, their belly-worship, their fostering of superstitious rites, and, basically, their association with the State power, which he denounces as a corruption of the purity of religion and a danger to civil liberty. Since their—

¹ *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty.*

"dignity, means and preferments have no foundation in the gospel, but only in the Prince's favour . . . it must needs be they should bend all their intentions and services to no other ends but to his."

So that—

"if it should happen that a tyrant . . . should come to grasp the Sceptre, here were his spearmen and his lances, here were his firelocks ready, he should need no other pretorian band nor pensionary than these, if they should once with their perfidious preachments awe the people."

Even at this stage Milton demanded the democratisation of the Church through the election of ministers by the separate congregations, which in the circumstances must have fostered political democracy—a fact which was recognised by the persecution of the Dissenters after the Restoration. His hatred of any compulsion in religious matters led him to foresee the necessity of the absolute separation of Church from State, the toleration of all Protestant sects and the removal of the property support of the clergy by the abolition of tithes.¹ We can readily believe the story of an eighteenth-century editor of Milton, that the high-flying clerics of the time used to buy up copies of his pamphlets in order to destroy them.

If Milton's style still holds us in admiration to-day, it is not merely because of his supreme literary skill, but because it is the effect of an unfaltering intellectual integrity. His repudiation of the authority of any

¹ *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, 1659. *Of True Religion, Heresy, Toleration and the Growth of Popery*, 1673. *Considerations touching the Likeliest Means to remove Hirelings out of the Church*, 1659.

tradition not tested by experience, his assertion of the adequacy of human reason are essential steps in the process of intellectual emancipation. Against the defenders of the accumulated errors of history, with whose dead weight they threatened to burden the enquiring spirit for all time, Milton advanced the progressive attainment of real knowledge through socially-motivated behaviour—"The wisdom of God created understanding fit and proportionable to truth, the object and end of it, as the eye to the thing visible."

So though it might seem at first that Milton was disproportionately passionate about surplices and liturgical prayers, in fact the issues went as deep as any which have gone to the making of our contemporary mode of thought.

The Bill for excluding the bishops from the House of Lords received the King's assent, and Milton, having published his most mature thoughts on the subject in *The Reason of Church Government*, was content to let the matter of Church reform rest there for some years:

"I had leisure," he says, "to turn my thoughts to other subjects; to the promotion of real and substantial liberty. . . . I perceived that there were three species of liberty which are essential to the happiness of social life—religious, domestic and civil."

As the chief obstacle to religious freedom seemed to have been removed and as Parliament was then "strenuously active" in obtaining the third, it was to the second or domestic species that he turned his attention, to divorce. His main argument in *The*

Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce is that under primitive, and therefore under properly reformed, Christianity, divorce was permitted for temperamental incompatability and not merely for sexual infidelity.

The state of the law has not yet advanced all the way to Milton's humane and reasonable conclusion and that is a measure of the prejudice and interest involved in the matter. Milton seems to have been unaware of the shocking effect such arguments would have on his contemporaries:

*"I did but prompt the age to quit their cloggs
By the known rules of antient liberty,
When strait a barbarous noise environs me
Of Owles and Cuckoes, Asses, Apes and Doggs."*

The most vociferous of these creatures were Presbyterians, those clerics who turned out to be as grasping and would-be tyrannical as the old prelatists. It was to forestall the re-imposition of a clerical censorship enforced with all the obscene ritual of the pillory and the gallows against blasphemous and heretical opinions, that Milton at this precise juncture composed his *Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*. It was not merely a personal effort, for he informs us that he had been importuned by many keen supporters of the Parliament to assist in this way in removing the obstacle to learning represented by the Ordinance of June 14th, 1643. By this regulation, no book or pamphlet might be printed "unless the same be first approved of and licensed under the hands of such person or persons as both or either of the said Houses shall appoint for the licensing of the same." Milton's famous pamphlet expresses "the

common grievance of all those who had prepared their minds and studies above the vulgar pitch to advance truth in others" against this reversion to the old-time practice of the Star Chamber which the first fervour of the Revolution had swept away. The 1640's were the seed-time of much that we now recognise as factors in our social progress, and the intellectual ferment was expressed in the extraordinary proliferation of sects whose opinions were regarded alike by the timid and by the dictatorial Presbyterian as subversive. Milton's enquiring mind was receptive to new ideas, and when he could not decide on the rights and wrongs of a question, he was convinced that the truth could be arrived at by free discussion. This pamphlet shows that his thoughts of reformation had been ranging far beyond the episcopal controversy: "It is not only the unmitring of a Bishop . . . that will make us a happy nation." There are other things to be altered, not only in the Church but "in the rule of life both economical¹ and political." The purification of religion must lead to the establishment of social justice.

Here is Milton's enthusiastic picture of that widespread striving for enlightenment which marked the time, to be contrasted with the Presbyterian Edwards' red-baiting best-seller, *Gangræna*, with its meant-to-be horrifying accounts of multitudes of tailors, cobblers and other "mechanick Tradesmen" daring to think for themselves:

"Behold now this vast City, a city of refuge, the mansion-house of Liberty. The shop of war hath not more anvils and hammers working, to fashion out the

¹ His own *Tractate on Education* (1644) was a valuable contribution here.

plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleaguered Truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas, wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. What could a man require more from a Nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a Nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies?"

The brush with the Presbyterian faction, the compromisers within the revolutionary ranks, was the prelude to full political antagonism. His increasing consciousness of their sinister role is shown by the fact that of the few poems he wrote in these years, three of them are attacks on those "new forcers of conscience," and summed up in the famous line:

"New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large."

As if in contrast to this ignoble theme, he wrote about the same time, three noble sonnets celebrating the courage, virtue and intelligence of the Parliamentary leaders, Cromwell, Fairfax, and Vane the Younger.

Milton's first public political statement, in the narrower sense of political, was a short pamphlet *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, published within a fortnight of Charles's execution. Its purpose was to provide the religious and philosophical justification for that action and an antidote to the propaganda against the Army and the Parliament which the Presbyterians

were developing in their fear of the democratic extension of the revolutionary movement. This dual purpose is explicitly set out in the full title.

Milton's political position by this time was pure republicanism, based, he says, on plain reason, though, of course, also deducible from Scripture:

"Since the King or Magistrate holds his authority of the people, both originally and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retain him or depose him though no Tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of free-born men, to be governed as seems to them best. This, though it cannot but stand with plain reason, shall be made good also by Scripture. Deuteronomy xvii. 14."

It has been said that Milton's thesis is "in line with the main development of liberal political theory throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance" and that he "says nothing that had not been said a hundred times."¹ But to assert popular sovereignty in general, and in such particular circumstances as the public and ceremonial (for it could not be called legal) decapitation of a king whose legitimacy was indisputable, this is as different as chalk from cheese. The murder or deposition of kings seemed natural to the English barons, as to any of the great feudal vassals; it was not breaking the rules of the game they played among themselves. But that the lower orders (and knowing how rich many of the Parliamentary leaders were we sometimes overlook the great gulf between

¹ Hanford, *A Milton Handbook*.

rank and wealth), should not have quietly killed Charles but deliberately challenged popular opinion by the appeal to right and justice, that was what made the ruling classes of Europe realise that something new had entered their circle of calculations.

The public adherence to the revolutionary position of a man so pre-eminent in learning and literary power was a reinforcement whose value the government was quick to appreciate. A few weeks after the publication of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton was invited by the Council of State to become its Secretary for Foreign Tongues. We can imagine the satisfaction with which Milton, for whom civic responsibility was an essential part of the intellectual's function, accepted this appointment. Besides the routine work of drafting the correspondence with foreign Powers, he was almost immediately involved in answering the attacks which were directed at the Government's policy, its principles and its personnel. The old order still engaged the sympathies of the majority of the intellectuals, whose social position was bound up with it, and clerics, journalists, balladists and lampoonists kept up a sniping fire which was quantitatively much heavier than what the Government could muster in reply.

The most influential production of Royalist propaganda was the *Eikon Basilike*, which was rushed from the press within a month of the king's execution. It was supposed to contain the private meditations of Charles during the years of civil struggle, but was in fact a deception, its actual author being a Dr. Gauden who received a bishopric at the Restoration. Its sub-title, *The True Portraiture of his Sacred Majesty in his Solitudes and Sufferings* sufficiently indicates its style and intention.

It is a mixture of the sophistry and sentimentality which with the aid of Van Dyck's paintings and Clarendon's *History* has kept alive the legend of Charles as a martyr to his religion and his people's welfare. The book was cleverly handled and had such a wide circulation that the government thought it must be answered on other grounds than its pretended authorship. Milton's counter-attack, *Eikonoklastes*, was delivered in October of the same year. The image-breaker destroys the kingly image feature by feature, in closely argued paragraphs and without the gorgeous interludes of his other pamphlets. Yet the style is intensely alive, as Milton re-lives stage by stage the years of bitter struggle and tears through the web of mendacity and misrepresentation with which the superficial apologist tries to entangle the issue. It is the most concise exposition extant of the necessity of armed rebellion and proves that at no stage could Charles have been trusted to give real guarantees for religious or civil freedom. The pamphlet reveals a mastery of the obdurate material of practical politics which is new in Milton, and even if, as seems probable, he received some help in it, shows that his exalted vision of liberty did not preclude him from seeking the most immediate knowledge of the ways and means through which men work towards it.

The quick crushing of the revolt in 1648 known as the Second Civil War showed that there was no hope at present of overthrowing the new Government without the help of foreign intervention. During the next few years, Royalist *émigrés* were busy intriguing in Paris, Brussels, Madrid and Rome to enlist the sympathy of those reactionary Courts. The sympathy they no doubt received, but the money and troops necessary to

restore them to their estates and privileges were slow to materialise, the foreign potentates being well aware that so long as Cromwell's army was intact they would break their teeth in such an enterprise. So the struggle raged in the ideological field, as the Royalists endeavoured to mould European opinion into a coalition against the monstrous portent of representative government which had arisen in England, presaging liberation to the downtrodden subjects of all the absolute rulers.

It was Milton's pamphlets¹ in answer to two of the most influential of these attacks on the Commonwealth which brought him the European reputation of which he was so justly proud, and to which the loss of his eyes, in such a cause, seemed a reasonable sacrifice.²

It is the later of these two pamphlets which reveals the driving-force animating Milton throughout the drought and dust of the controversy. Here he seeks relief from swapping quotations and discrediting the morals and scholarship of his antagonist in an enthusiastic celebration of the freedom which England had achieved, the great exemplar which all other nations would seek to emulate. Proud as he is to write himself Englishman, it is in no narrow sense of racial superiority that he does so, and he pauses before opening his argument to visualise the mightiest audience that a man had ever yet addressed. It is a deservedly famous passage, the keynote

¹ *John Milton the Englishman's Defence of the English People Against Salmasius*, 1651, in reply to *Defensio Regia pro Carolo I*, by Claude Saumaise; *The Second Defence of the English People by John Milton, Englishman, in reply to an infamous Book*, 1654, i.e. to *The Cry of the King's Blood to Heaven against the English Parricides*, by Peter Du Moulin. As this controversy was addressed to an international audience it was conducted in Latin. Essential parts of the second of Milton's pamphlets are translated in *his Selected Prose in the World's Classics*.

² *To Mr. Cyriac Skinner upon his Blindness*.

of all the democratic revolutions which have since shaken and invigorated civilisation:

"I seem to survey, as from a towering height, the far extended tracts of sea and land, and innumerable crowds of spectators, betraying in their looks the liveliest interest, and sensations the most congenial with my own. Here I behold the stout and manly prowess of the Germans disdaining servitude; there the generous and lively impetuosity of the French; on this side, the calm and stately valour of the Spaniard; on that, the composed and wary magnanimity of the Italian. Of all the lovers of liberty and virtue, the magnanimous and the wise, in whatever quarter they may be found, some secretly favour, others openly approve; some greet me with congratulations and applause; others, who had long been proof against conviction, at last yield themselves captive to the force of truth. Surrounded by congregated multitudes, I now imagine that, from the columns of Hercules to the Indian Ocean, I behold the nations of the earth recovering that liberty which they so long had lost. . . ."

And it is here that he eulogises the wisdom and valour of the leaders of the Commonwealth, and exhorts them to continue resolutely on the course which they had so daringly set out. It is clear to us, looking back, that the revolutionary impulse was in fact subsiding, that with the crushing of the Levellers its democratic gains could not be all maintained. For all Milton's buoyancy of spirit, his noble optimism, he could not but have sensed this lapse of the tide. But, far from causing him to despair, it spurs him to urge on his heroes to greater efforts, to root out the corruption, "the

propensity to avarice, to ambition, and sensuality," which was frustrating the consummation of the great design whose foundations had been so well and truly laid.

From this time on, the current of events definitely turned against all that Milton stood for, but with the magnificent arrogance of a great idealist he would not go with it, but fought to the last to stem it. On the very eve of the Restoration he issued a call to the remaining loyalists of the Revolution which in its very title expresses his sublime contempt for mere contingencies. The deluded crowds might cheer their way to slavery afresh, but the blind thinker will still appeal to the reason and righteousness that has not yet succumbed: he offers them *The ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, and the excellence thereof, compared with the inconveniences and dangers of readmitting kingship in this kingdom.*

A month later Charles Stuart, second of the name, landed at Dover as King of England.

In this, his last political statement, Milton foretold in terms fully borne out by the event, the horrible degeneracy of Charles's reign, in which the much-publicised debauchery of the Court is of less significance than the religious intolerance, the decline of civil liberty, and the mental sycophancy of all but a very few. In that long "Lent of servitude" of which he had warned the waverers in his *Second Defence*, so noted an enemy of the old régime had by force to be silent, and it was touch and go whether the apologist for regicide would not follow the regicides to the gallows. But he made no terms with the reaction; it was not for him to buy himself off like the pack of common poets who could dedicate an ode to Charles with the same facility

as an ode to Cromwell. Only Andrew Marvell stands out in unimpeachable integrity, and it is to his efforts largely, it seems, that Milton owed his life, and so the years in which to complete the epics in which his pent-up energies found expression, now that he could no longer serve the cause in any more immediate task.

The continued vitality of Milton's work shows that the issues with which he was concerned have not even yet been decided. Though the terms of the controversies in which he engaged are rather remote from us, the principles he evolved demand a re-ordering of society for their realisation. That is why his fame is still the battle-ground of conflicting interests, and each successive book about him tends to turn into a polemic with its predecessors. The fog of Mediævalism which he swept aside is not unfamiliar to us to-day, in the form of a lack of confidence in human ability to expunge the evils of society. If it is necessary to re-emphasise the audacity of Milton's thought, it is because Puritanism has quite incorrectly become synonymous with mere abstinence and other worldliness; and Milton often suffers from identification with this sort of Puritanism.

He fought to free us from the tyranny of the parish priest as well as of arbitrary and irresponsible executive power. History played him a dirty trick, but nothing can negate his testimony to his belief that men can construct a society for themselves in which a reasoned and conscious discipline will liberate the active virtue in each individual.

How was it that such a society did not come about in Milton's day? If the people do not persevere in the path of virtue, posterity, he says, "will see that there was a rich harvest of glory, and an opportunity

afforded for the greatest achievements, but that men only were wanting for the execution; while they were not wanting who could rightly counsel, exhort, inspire and bind an unfading wreath of praise round the brows of the illustrious actors in so glorious a scene."

If Milton could only think in terms of individuals, yet he here nearly puts his finger on the spot. The men were wanting who could bring into being the ideas of organisation latent in the advanced speculation of the time. Such a class of men was only to be created in a furnace of suffering, in which the justice and mercy of Milton's inspiration seemed to be consumed utterly.

BOOKS FOR FUTURE READING

The following list of books has been arranged under four headings, and in some cases brief notes have been added to give the reader some indication of their reliability from the point of view of Marxism. Those titles which are marked with an asterisk are especially suitable for the general reader, whereas the others will be of more interest to the specialist.

(a) GENERAL

- *1. R. H. TAWNEY. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Penguin.

Not Marxist, but showing the general connection between Protestant ideas and the rise of the bourgeoisie.

2. H. J. LASKI. *The Rise of European Liberalism*.

A semi-Marxist interpretation of the political theories of the bourgeoisie.

- *3. A. L. MORTON. *A People's History of England*, (in conjunction with Daphne May's *Study Guide*).

4. M. H. DOBB. *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*. Fundamental work, essential to the full understanding of the revolution.

(b) ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

1. L. C. KNIGHTS. *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*.

2. R. H. TAWNEY. *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*.

3. R. H. TAWNEY (Ed.). *Wilson's Discourse on Usury*.

Nos. 1-3 give social and economic background. Not Marxist, but very aware of the economic factor.

- *4. K. MARX. *Capital*, Vol. I, ed. Dona Torr. Chapters XXVI-VIII.

5. V. I. LENIN. *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Selected Works, Vol. I).

Describes a state of society very similar to seventeenth-century England.

*6. K. KAUTSKY. *Thomas More and his Utopia*.

Marxist study of conditions in sixteenth-century England and of the Reformation.

7. H. C. WHITE. *Social Criticism in Popular Religious Literature of the Sixteenth Century*.

8. F. J. FISHER (Ed.). *Sir Thomas Wilson's State of England, 1600. (Camden Miscellany, Vol. XVI.)*

By a contemporary who was very aware of the social struggle of his time.

9. J. E. THOROLD ROGERS. *The Economic Interpretation of History*.

A materialist interpretation by a Victorian radical.

10. WADSWORTH and MANN. *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, Part I*.

This book and Nos. 11-13 are specialist studies showing the social significance of industrial development in the century before the Revolution.

11. G. D. RAMSAY. *The Wiltshire Woollen Industry in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*.

12. J. U. NEF. *The Rise of the British Coal Industry* (2 vols.).

13. J. U. NEF. "The Progress of Technology and the Growth of Large Scale Industry in Great Britain, 1540-1640" (article in *The Economic History Review*, October, 1934).

14. R. H. TAWNEY. "The rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640" (article in *The Economic History Review*, 1941).

15. L. STONE. "State Control in Sixteenth Century England" (article in *The Economic History Review*, 1947).

16. L. STONE. "Anatomy of the Elizabethan Aristocracy" (article in *The Economic History Review*, 1948).

17. H. J. HABBAKUK. "English Landownership, 1680-1740" (article in *The Economic History Review*, February, 1940).

Also deals with earlier seventeenth century.

(c) THE REVOLUTION

1. M. JAMES. *Social Policy during the Puritan Revolution*.

A mine of social information from which the reader can draw his own conclusions.

- *2. E. BERNSTEIN. *Cromwell and Communism*.

Attempt at a Marxist interpretation.

- *3. H. HOLORENSHAW. *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (L.B.C. Educational series).

Useful Marxist study, though perhaps exaggerating "socialist" tendencies among the Levellers.

4. G. LENZ. "Demokratie und Diktatur in der englischen Revolution" (*Beiheft 28 der Historischen Zeitschrift*).

Not specifically Marxist, but the best general interpretation.

5. A. S. P. WOODHOUSE (Ed.). *Puritanism and Liberty*.

Contains the debates in the Army Council of 1647.

6. D. WOLFE. *Leveller Manifestoes*.

Like No. 7, a useful collection of documents.

7. W. HALLER and G. DAVIES. *Leveller Tracts, 1647-53*.

8. C. HILL. "Soviet Interpretations of the Interregnum" (article in *The Economic History Review*, May, 1938).

Reproduces the views of Soviet historians.

9. C. HILL. "The Agrarian Legislation of the Interregnum" (article in *The English Historical Review*, April, 1940).

10. J. LINDSAY. 1649.

A novel.

11. D. W. PETEGORSKY. *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*.

A study of Winstanley.

- *12. L. D. HAMILTON. (Ed.). *Selections from the Works of Gerrard Winstanley*.

- *13. C. E. GORE. "The 250th Anniversary of the 'Glorious' Revolution of 1688" (article in the *Communist International*, November, 1938).

14. R. B. SCHLATTER. *Social Ideas of Religious Leaders 1660-88.*

Much very interesting material.

15. B. HESSEN. "Social and Economic Roots of Newton's *Principia*" (in *Science at the Cross Roads*, 1931).

An attempt to show the social basis of "pure" science.

16. M. JAMES and M. WEINSTOCK. *England during the Interregnum*

A useful collection of documents.

17. M. JAMES. "The political importance of the tithes controversy in the English Revolution" (article in *History*, June, 1941).

18. C. HILL. "The English Civil War in the Writings of Marx and Engels" (article in *Science and Society*, Winter, 1948).

19. *The Modern Quarterly*, Spring 1949 (Tercentenary number, 1649-1949).

(d) MILTON

- *1. *The Poetical Works*. (Oxford Standard Authors.)

A new edition contains translations of all the Latin poems.

- *2. *Milton's Prose*. (World's Classics Series.)

Best selection for the general reader.

3. P. B. and E. M. W. TILLYARD. *Milton: Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises*.

Translation of Milton's lesser-known writings.

4. D. MASSON. *Life of Milton and History of his Time* (6 vols.).

A deservedly famous work.

5. J. H. HANFORD. *A Milton Handbook*.

The best short guide.

6. D. SAURAT. *Milton, Man and Thinker*.

7. D. M. WOLFE. *Milton in the Puritan Revolution*.